This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

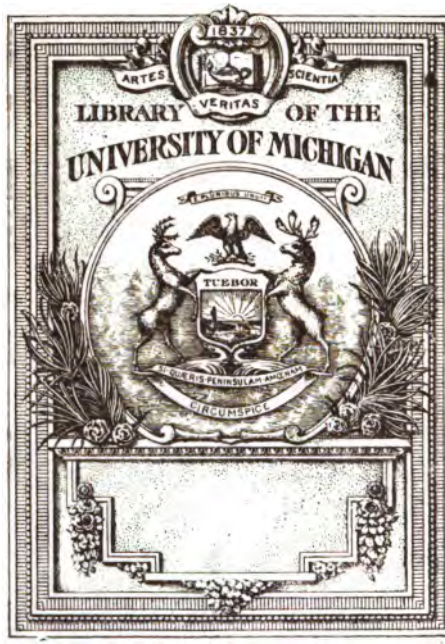
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


1837
ARTES
VERITAS
SCIENTIA
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
TUEBOR
SI QUAERIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM
CIRCUMSPICE

828
B85V
P6

# VIVA.

## A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. FORRESTER,

AUTHOR OF "DOLORES," "DIANA CAREW," "MIGNON," ETC.

"And be sure your sin will find you out."

---

*Evanthe.*—"Pray, Captain, tell the King,
They that are sad on Earth, in Heaven shall sing."
*Beaumont and Fletcher.*

---

PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1896.

Copyright, 1878, by J. B. Lippincott & Co.

# CONTENTS.


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | AT COMPIÈGNE | 7 |
| II. | ONLY SELFISH | 15 |
| III. | DÉSILLUSIONNÉE | 25 |
| IV. | AT THE "VAUDEVILLE" | 37 |
| V. | A MAN OF THE WORLD | 49 |
| VI. | A COSTLY KISS | 60 |
| VII. | ALL—SAVE LOVE ALONE | 73 |
| VIII. | THE DIAMOND SNAKE | 81 |
| IX. | FRIEND? OR BITTEREST FOE? | 91 |
| X. | "TO-MORROW, I WILL KILL YOU IF I CAN!" | 102 |
| XI. | AT TWELVE PACES | 112 |
| XII. | TOO LATE | 122 |
| XIII. | LADY RYVENDALE'S "WORD IN SEASON" | 132 |
| XIV. | A CLUSTER OF FORGET-ME-NOTS | 140 |
| XV. | WEARY AND WORLD-WORN | 148 |
| XVI. | RICH, BUT HOW POOR! | 157 |
| XVII. | A COQUETTE | 169 |
| XVIII. | "O, BEWARE, MY LORD, OF JEALOUSY!" | 179 |
| XIX. | THE PALE, FAIR SAINT | 190 |
| XX. | THE CHRONICLE OF SAINT OSYTH | 199 |
| XXI. | THE COURSE F POSSESSION | 208 |
| XXII. | LOVE GROWS AWEARY | 218 |
| XXIII. | ALSAGER'S UNWORTHY PLEA | 228 |
| XXIV. | "UNRESPITED, UNPITIED, UNREPRIEVED" | 238 |
| XXV. | THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW | 246 |
| XXVI. | ONLY A WOMAN'S HEART | 256 |
| XXVII. | "A LEAVE-TAKING" | 265 |
| XXVIII. | A SIREN OF SOCIETY | 278 |
| XXIX. | HAPPY EVER AFTER? | 285 |
| XXX. | CONVINCED AGAINST HER WILL | 295 |
| XXXI. | PELION ON OSSA | 304 |
| XXXII. | MRS. FAIRSTAR'S MANŒUVRE | 312 |
| XXXIII. | "FORGOTTEN BY THE WORLD" | 322 |
| XXXIV. | BERTIE | 331 |
| XXXV. | THE LAST "GOOD-BY" | 340 |
| XXXVI. | "THE TRIUMPH OF TIME" | 351 |




317410

# VIVA.

## CHAPTER I.

### AT COMPIÈGNE.

A SHIMMER of satin, a cloud of laces, gems that sparkle under the countless wax-lights, gems, rarer still, that flash with more perishable brilliancy from beneath the arched brows of their fair owners, odors of rare flowers, rustle of rich garments, a low hum of voices, broken now and then by the *rire perlé* of a pretty woman, or a man's deeper tones.

In the Galérie des Cartes at Compiègne the guests of the Emperor and Empress of France are awaiting their imperial hosts. It is the *mauvais quart-d'heure* before dinner, and conversation is as desultory and uninteresting as usual at this particular period of the day. Here and there, a couple of diplomatists seem really interested in their talk, but most of the guests are a little bored, a little impatient, and find their best amusement in watching the great folding doors that unclose every moment to give ingress to fresh members of the party.

"Five minutes to seven!" says the English ambassador, looking at his watch and speaking to a young man who stands near him. "I hope the presentations will not take long tonight. I did not lunch, and am tremendously hungry."

"And I," responds Captain Clive, the man addressed.

"Oh, a young fellow like you ought to find feast enough in gazing at all this beauty," says the ambassador, smiling and looking round at the bevy of richly-dressed fair ones.

Captain Clive lets his eyes travel over the room with the critical glance of a man accustomed to the sight of pretty, well-bred women.

"I do not see anything very dazzling to-night," he remarks, with a shade of languor by no means unbecoming to him.

"No one you are likely to lose your heart to, eh, Alsager?"

"My heart!" repeats the young man, smiling, and disclosing teeth so white and pearly that they would go far towards making a less handsome face good-looking. "I do not think I have one: at all events, it is a long time since it made me aware of its existence. Completely ossified, I should say."

At this instant the doors unclose to admit two more guests, apparently husband and wife.

"*She is charming!*" says Alsager to himself, and, strange to say, he feels a slight throb about the region he has just declared to be destitute of sensation.

"How are you, Duc? Madame la Duchesse, this is indeed a pleasure," says the ambassador, gallantly. And the duchess, having cordially returned his salutation, passes on to speak to a lady standing near, whilst Captain Clive looks at her as though it would take a long time to satiate his eyes with her fairness.

*She is charming.* One might seek far and wide without finding a phrase better suited to describe the young duchess. Beautiful? Well, no! beauty has so wide and deep a meaning, and the word somehow conveys to my mind a sense of cold perfection. Lovely? Yes, if lovely means, as I take it, lovable and sweet and gracious,—yes, the duchess is lovely. There is a refinement in the very air she breathes, an elegance of carriage, a distinction of manner, that, if her face were less fair, would attract attention to her at once. But her face *is* fair. Her eyes are lovely and deep-colored, her skin is like the petals of a rare pale rose, such a skin as no art can imitate, no hand paint but the cunning hand of nature, and she only when she mixes youth and health on her palette. The face is framed in dark, lustrous hair, the red mouth is sweet and sensitive. And such a figure! Not fat, not embonpoint, but, oh! so far from thin! so delicately rounded, so exquisitely shaped! Such a form as some Italian sculptors have made immortal,—sculptors who, it is said, chose their models among young girls. She is dressed in white, all white, not the vaunted *blanche mousseline*, but a rare costly fabric, and brow, neck, and arms are literally ablaze with diamonds.

"Duke," says the ambassador, "let me present to you a

countryman of mine, Captain Clive; Alsager, M. le Duc de Lallière."

"Clive!" repeats the duke, in excellent English. "A relation of Lord Ryvendale?"

"He is my brother."

"Ah, then it must have been your father I had the pleasure of meeting a few years ago at a dinner Lord A. gave the night before the Derby."

And straightway the duke falls to talk of racing-matters, about which he is quite an enthusiast. His greatest ambition in life is to win a Derby.

Meantime, two officers of the palace are going from group to group, whispering a few words here and there, and a general movement begins to take place. The guests make their way slowly to the door and form into a double line, the men on one side, the ladies opposite.

"That means that their Majesties are coming," says the ambassador.

"*A la bonne heure!*" rejoins the duke.

Two minutes of general expectation, and then the folding doors are flung wide open, and the Emperor, attended by his chamberlain, comes in. He walks slowly down the ranks, bowing graciously, stopping here and there for a new guest to be presented or to say a pleasant word to one he knows. When he comes to our group, he shakes all three by the hand: the duke is a personal friend; and his Majesty never loses an opportunity of being gracious to an Englishman.

Meantime the Empress has entered with her lady-in-waiting, and is passing down the line on the ladies' side. She is looking lovely, exquisitely dressed, proud and fair and happy as the woman should be who is Empress of one of the greatest kingdoms in Europe, Empress of France, Empress of Fashion, Empress of Hearts. Nothing can exceed the grace and charm of her manner; it would be impossible for one member of the large assembly to imagine him or herself overlooked. When she has greeted every lady, she returns on the side of the men, whilst the Emperor crosses and comes up the line to receive the *empressées* salutations of the fair.

And all this time Captain Clive has hardly taken his eyes from the Duchesse de Lallière. He is saying to himself, "I have seen her before, but where?—where?" and his soul is

vexed because he can find no clew to satisfy his curiosity. He observes that when the Empress passes the duchess, she greets her with marked distinction. Will some one who understands affinities and sympathies, and the laws of attraction, explain to me why this act of favor and courtesy should send a faint thrill of satisfaction through the breast of Captain Alsager Clive? What was he to the duchess, or the duchess to him? The fact remains one, though I can offer no explanation or excuse for it.

The imperial pair have greeted every one, and the adjutant-general of the palace announces that dinner is served. Their Majesties pass first, followed by those guests who are to have the honor of sitting next them. The duchess is one. Slowly the handsome cortége passes across the Salle des Gardes into the banqueting-hall. It is an imposing sight,—the floods of light, the rustling of rich fabrics, the odor of hot-house flowers, the magnificent jewels and dazzling toilets of the fair guests. And when they arrive on the threshold of the dining-room, little Lady G., who leans on Captain Clive's arm, involuntarily tightens her clasp. She can scarcely restrain the "oh!" that is the outward and visible sign the untrained give of intense delight and wonder. She is little more than a child: she has only been married six months to old Lord G., whose wealth and position have given her the entrée to fairy-land to-night. She is quite a novice; but even Captain Clive, who has been a guest at almost every court in Europe and is perfectly familiar with every phase of pomp and magnificence, cannot fail to be struck by this gorgeous display. A burst of unseen music greets them as they enter; the room is ablaze with countless wax-lights, with a garden of flowers, with silver, and crystal that flashes back a thousand rays of colored light. The choicest fruits peep from baskets gleaming with every color of the prism; from end to end of the long table are magnificent silver centre-pieces, representing different episodes of the stag-hunt; the burnished plate placed for each guest helps to form a silver girdle round the snowy cloth. Half an army of attendants are in waiting,—the ushers in pale blue with three-cornered hats, the footmen powdered and wearing splendid green liveries covered with gold lace.

Lady G. is radiant with delight at taking part in so splendid a pageant: her eyes are feasting upon all these luxurious de-

tails: she is thinking, good-natured little soul, what a letter she will write home to her mother and sister to-morrow, copiously underlined we may be sure. She will tell them, too, that she was taken in to dinner by the *fascinating* Captain Clive of whom they have often heard. But before the banquet is over, the little lady has formed a somewhat mean opinion of the fascination she would so gladly have vaunted. How willingly would she have embarked on a flirtation with him had he shown any similar disposition! Her old husband is placed far away from her, but he is by no means jealous or tyrannical, only a well-bred, selfish old *gourmet*, who would be infinitely more chagrined to see his neighbor supplied with choicer truffles or a more tempting morsel of calipash than himself, than if he witnessed a whole regiment of captains making *doux yeux* at his wife. But were he Bluebeard himself, and placed immediately opposite to Captain Clive, he would see nothing in that young gentleman's manner to cause him the smallest uneasiness. Poor little Lady G. is mortified. It is hard not to be able to indemnify oneself sometimes for having a stupid, greedy old husband. But Alsager's eyes and thoughts are all for the duchess. His soul is vexed with curiosity to know where he has seen her before: once or twice her eyes meet his, and he fancies he detects a smile lurking at the corners of her mouth as though she were in possession of the knowledge he so ardently desires. She is seated on the right of the Emperor, who turns frequently to speak to her. The languor with which he seemed oppressed at the beginning of dinner is disappearing; he looks really interested; and his bearing to the young duchess betokens that she is a favorite. Alsager watches her keenly, but her manner leaves nothing to desire: it is gay and unembarrassed, but she has the *savoir-faire* of the true courtier who never permits himself to forget, however much royalty may appear to ignore it, the distance that separates the sovereign from the subject.

The music plays on: the *brouhaha* of conversation grows in volume, the first slight feeling of respectful *gêne* in the imperial presence is wearing off, the hearts of the guests are warming under the influence of choice viands and exquisite wines. Bright eyes are growing brighter, white shoulders are leaning confidentially nearer their neighbors, men are waxing more tender in their manner, more eloquent in their glances,—warmed

and softened, as men ever are, by the influence of an irreproachable dinner. It is the music, the flowers, the diamonds, the soft sense of luxury that, for the most part, sends the blood flowing warmly through a woman's veins (a young woman's), but with nearly every man it is the food he eats, the wine he drinks.

Lady G. tries her utmost to draw her neighbor out and to make herself agreeable to him, whilst he is wishing devoutly that she would leave him to eat his dinner in peace and look at the charming face on the other side of the table. But he is good-natured, and, seeing how earnestly she desires to be pleasing to him, allows himself at last to be drawn into conversation, if one may so dignify Lady G.'s desultory chatter.

The dinner does not last long, not so long as many of the guests could wish, but it fatigues the Emperor to sit through a prolonged banquet. The imperial hosts rise and head the cortége back through the Salle des Gardes to the Galérie des Cartes whilst the music bursts into a grand finale. The stiff stateliness that characterized the entry has given way to a genial *abandon;* the sense of *bien-être* consequent upon having dined well pervades the company.

"It is a barbarous custom to leave the table with the women!" growls Lord G. to another Englishman.

"And to leave such claret!" sighs the other.

The Empress has retired with some of her ladies to a drawing-room opening from the gallery, but the Emperor is standing at one of the windows, still talking to the duchess. One of the palace officials brings his Majesty's coffee on a gold salver; at the same moment, his favorite dog is led in. It has been sent for at the duchess's special request. The animal breaks away from the servant and bounds forward to his master, in the exuberance of his joy, dashing the Sèvres gem from his hand, and spilling the contents chiefly over the lovely dress of the fair duchess.

The Emperor is unfeignedly vexed, and stoops to wipe the stains with his handkerchief, whilst the duchess gayly protests that it is nothing.

"You see, duchess," murmurs the Emperor, in his languid tones, "what mischief our friends may do us with the best intentions."

The guests who stand near prick up their ears with respect-

ful curiosity, and try to find a hidden meaning behind the imperial words.

"But it is good to have friends, sire," the duchess answers, laying her hand on the dog's head. He looks wistfully in her face and wags his tail, knowing with the instinct that is so much quicker and truer than a man's reason, that he has found a friend. Several ladies standing near try to entice him with flattering words: they would have thought it well worth while to spoil a costly dress for the sake of being an object of solicitude to the Emperor.

"What a pity we have not some bonbons to give him!" says a pretty little countess, who in her heart, however, cherishes a mortal horror of dogs. "How did you do, duchesse, to make him so friendly? have you fed him?"

"Oh, no, comtesse," she answers, smiling: "he knows I love dogs."

"How does he know?" asks the countess, affecting a pretty curiosity.

"He knows by my eyes and by the touch of my hand that I am his friend, more than if I gave him a thousand bonbons."

"Right, duchess," says the Emperor. "Men love you for what you can give them; dogs love you for yourself."

At this moment one of the ladies-in-waiting approaches, and, making a low reverence to the Emperor, informs the duchess that her Majesty requests her attendance.

"You excuse me, sire?" she asks; and the Emperor replies,—

"One must submit to one's misfortunes, duchess." She makes him a graceful curtsey and goes.

"My dear fellow, why do you look so pensive?" says an English attaché, linking his arm in Captain Clive's. "Are you repenting old sins and contemplating new ones, or are you trying to calculate how old your great-grandmother would be if she were alive at the present moment?"

"I am puzzled," replies Alsager. "Perhaps you can help me."

"As long as it is not a question about our policy, command me."

"Confound your policy! I want to know where I have met the Duchess de Lallière?"

"Met her? Anywhere, everywhere, with a distinction of

course. At the Tuileries, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, at the English court. She is an Englishwoman, you know."

"I could have sworn it!" cries Alsager, with enthusiasm.

"On the British principle that every good thing must come out of Britain?" laughs the other.

"Who was she? What was her name?"

The attaché pauses.

"How stupid! it has quite escaped me. And I know it as well as I do my own. I am afraid the intense strain of diplomacy upon the brain is weakening my memory. I shall remember it directly. She is to appear in the tableaux to-night. D—— is here and has been getting them up. I expect they will be very perfect. The two first are to be Joy and Sorrow."

"The duchess of course plays Joy?"

"Yes. No one knows yet who takes Sorrow, but it is generally supposed the handsome widow who *poses* for being heart-broken. She has magnificent eyes and a tragic, desolate air, though every one knows that the defunct beat her, and that she hated him as a woman only can hate her husband. However, the mystery will soon be solved now: the performance begins in half an hour. After the tableaux there is to be a comedietta, in which Princess M—— takes the principal rôle. Have you ever seen her act? She is simply wonderful. If she were on the boards, she would have all Paris at her feet."

Half an hour later, Captain Clive is in the theatre, waiting with a gay and expectant audience for the *lever du rideau*. The curtain is withdrawn; cloud after cloud of gauze is skilfully removed; the group takes an outline; presently it stands revealed. A burst of applause breaks the momentary hush. In the centre stands the young duchess, crowned and garlanded with flowers, and at her feet are grouped Morning, Love, Hope, Pleasure. They are all fair and graceful, their pose is as artistic as the master-hand of D—— can make it, but the centre figure is the one that attracts all eyes and hearts. For her fair young face is so radiant, so glad, the soul speaks so eloquently through her lovely eyes, she seems indeed a living incarnation of joy, a ray of happiness caught and imprisoned for one fleeting moment.

Alsager holds his breath and gazes as though he would fix the scene upon his heart forever.

Their Majesties lead the applause. Thrice is the curtain raised. Then Captain Clive turns to go out: he does not care to have that sweet picture effaced by another, however fair. But, to his annoyance, he finds himself hemmed in: it would be impossible to get out without disarranging some ladies. So he elects to stay, and, closing his eyes, he sees once again that radiant face. He hears many conjectures around him as to who will impersonate Sorrow. But he feels no curiosity: it is a matter of perfect, absolute indifference to him.

Hush! The curtain is rising again. Alsager keeps his eyes shut: he has no desire to see this tableau, but so strange, so intense a silence has fallen upon the assembly that involuntarily, in spite of himself, he uncloses them and looks. Never to his dying day will he forget that sight. There, against a background of dark rocks, stands a frail, woman's form, all sable-clad, with white arms hanging down and fingers writhing in each other's clasp, and at her feet crouch the figures of Night, Despair, and Death. And in her face there is such a world of sorrow, of woe unutterable, of despair without ray of hope, that those who gaze at her are fain to weep for very sympathy. A cold hand seems to clutch at Alsager's heart. Does the prescience already come to him that the future holds a day wherein, looking upon that grief-stricken face, it will be for him to bow his head and cry, "*Mea culpa*"?

---

## CHAPTER II.

### ONLY SELFISH.

It is the Duchesse de Lallière. There is no applause this time, nor is the curtain raised again. The composer of the tableaux has previously asked as a favor of their Majesties that this one may not be encored. It has produced almost a painful effect: there is a dimness in the eyes of the fair Empress; it is not until a peal of gay music bursts forth that the feeling is dissipated.

"What an insight into character D—— must have!" says a man standing behind Captain Clive to another. "Never

should I have imagined the lovely admired duchess, with whom life is one perpetual fête, capable of so sad an expression."

"If she has not yet suffered, she will," the other answers. "A woman who is able to express such anguish in her face has the power to feel it in her heart."

"And the occasion no doubt will not be wanting," says the first, with a sigh. "But look! there she is!" And at this moment Captain Clive observes that the Duchesse de Lallière has entered the imperial box and is receiving with a charming smile the Empress's compliments.

"Vive la joie!" says some one, and Clive threads his way out. Some indefinable instinct makes him seek the open air. A few moments later, he is standing bare-headed in the Park. It is a clear October night; there is no moon, but the stars are shining out, bringing the alleys of magnificent trees into bold relief. Captain Clive feels a certain sense of irritation against himself for having been so moved by what was after all only a clever piece of acting.

"It is stupid," he says, "to try to awaken painful emotions when the object is merely to amuse. All theatrical representations should be pleasing. I would have tragedies, and novels that end badly, burned by the common hangman."

Let me pause a moment, as he stands, to sketch you the portrait of my hero. Hero! how can a man merit that grand title who does no good worth recording in his life, who, on the contrary, by his selfishness curses and embitters irretrievably the life of another human being? Captain the Honorable Alsager Clive has no better title to being a hero than that he occupies the principal rôle in this story. Yet do not misunderstand me: do not suspect this frank debonair-looking young Englishman of any secret villany. No need to look down at those shapely feet to be sure there is no cloven hoof to conceal: as he stands bare-headed in the autumn night with the soft wind stirring his close-shorn curls, I have no evil to record against him, no crime to brand him worse than his fellow-men: I could say nothing more to his prejudice than that perhaps he is a little selfish.

*Only selfish!* Great heaven! what vice has served the devil's turn half so well as this little failing so common to fallen humanity, which it would seem almost harsh to call by

so stern a name. *Only selfish!* the man who by his extravagance impoverishes his family, who in the pursuit of pleasure spends money he does not possess, cripples his parents, and robs his sisters of their modest dowries (or perhaps their very means of existence at the father's death) to pay his debts of honor, may be *only selfish.* The wife who squanders in reckless ostentation the money her husband is shortening his life by toil and anxiety to win is *only selfish;* the man who plucks a human flower that grows in the pathway of his life and casts it away to be trampled under foot and to rot among foul weeds is *only selfish;* the man or woman who, for vanity's sake, encourages and wins a love he or she never means to requite, and so spoils a life, is *only selfish;* the man who seeks his pleasure abroad and leaves an aching heart at home is *only selfish;* the being who curses a whole household by caprice and ill temper is *only selfish!* None of these things, however, are to be scored against Alsager Clive so far: he has robbed neither mother nor sisters by his extravagance; if he has spent more than his income (which he certainly has on more occasions than one), it has been no serious inconvenience to his father and elder brother; he has not deliberately led any woman into guilt or folly, though he may have participated in both; and he has an excellent temper.

The novelist of to-day does not consider it *de rigueur* to make his heroes faultlessly handsome nor to enter into long details of feature and coloring, and indeed, unless a man or woman be undeniably handsome, beauty is so much "in the eye of the beholder" that minute description is unwise, especially if one desires to prepossess the reader.

Captain Clive is a man on whose appearance you might hear a dozen different opinions from as many persons: he is "good-looking," "nice-looking," "charming," "he has such a pleasing expression," "he is handsome," "no, not handsome, but his manner is very fascinating," etc., etc.

"At all events, he is a perfect gentleman." And this is so obvious that no one thinks it necessary to respond to the remark. One gift Captain Clive possesses,—eyes that can make a woman believe anything that his lips utter, and when he speaks with them he is always sincere (for the moment at least).

He is a general favorite: most men with a pleasant smile

and a good temper are: men like him, so do women, children, and animals. Fortune has not been a niggard godmother to him: she has endowed him with most things that make life worth having,—health, courage, good spirits. He is well-born, and, if not over-burdened with money, is at least ignorant of the sensation of wanting anything material to his comfort. And he has an excellent chance of succeeding his brother Lord Ryvendale, who is consumptive, and who two years ago lost his only son.

A perturbed mind is so unusual a thing with Captain Clive that he feels as surprised and irritated as a man who has never known an ache or pain might do on awaking one morning with a headache. The sensation, however, does not last long, but gives way to the previous feeling of provoked curiosity to know where he and the duchess have met before.

Who does not know the exciting sport of hunting a souvenir! how it eludes us just as we are about to grasp it, how it carries us over hill and dale, into the clouds and under the earth, and sometimes leaves us at last in the same impenetrable darkness! And who does not know the triumph of catching it after a long chase, even when it is only a little paltry occurrence not worth the trouble of remembering!

Alsager Clive hunts on in his memory with true British obstinacy.

"By Jove! I have it!" he cries, at last, with a sense of genuine triumph. And swiftly through his mind flashes the scene of their last meeting.

The palace, blazing with lights, disappears, the great avenues of trees fade from his sight, and, instead, he sees a gray November morning in England. He has not long been home from India, and is down at his father's place in Southshire. It is a hunting-morning, and, for some reason that he forgets or does not care to remember now, he has been late at the meet. The hounds have found and gone away; he sees two or three straggling red-coats a couple of fields ahead of him, and he is sailing after them on his gallant bay in not the best humor in the world. He is fast diminishing the distance between himself and them, when he is conscious of another actor upon the scene. To his intense disgust, it is a woman and alone! Captain Clive is fired by an unworthy ambition: he wants to pass her, so that, if she *should* come to grief, he, at

all events, will not be behind to pick up the pieces. But Fate, in her pleasant little ironical way, ordains that our hero shall be the victim of the calamity he is most eager to avoid. The fair Amazon's horse blunders at a fence, and, to his horror, he sees him go crashing down on the other side. The rider has disappeared. No wonder hunting-men hate women to ride to hounds. A man may be dreadfully cut up to see his friend lying insensible, perhaps dead, on the field, but it cannot fill his mind with the appalling horror that the sight of a woman in a similar predicament does. Alsager's heart stands still as he makes for a gap lower down, not desiring to increase the catastrophe by crushing the hapless fair one beneath the bay's hoofs. It is with something between delight and indignation that, as he comes up, he sees a very pretty face looking up archly out of the ditch in which the lower half of its owner is submerged,—delight that she is uninjured, indignation that he has lost all chance of a run for nothing. He, however, dismounts with an excellent grace to her assistance.

"I am so dreadfully sorry," she says, halting between smiles and tears. "I have spoiled your run, and—and my horse has broken his girths, and what *shall* I do?"

The position certainly offers complications. Alsager looks about him, but neither far nor near does he see a sign of any one who appears to belong to the distressed damsel.

"Are you out—alone?" he asks, with some hesitation.

"Yes—no," she stammers. "I was out for a ride with my groom: I did not mean to follow, and he is on the old black cob which won't jump a yard, and—and it serves me right."

Here the lovely eyes are veiled by tears of vexation, and the red lips quiver.

Captain Clive grasps the situation. One more added to the list of the fair daughters of Eve who have fallen through disobedience.

She is still in the ditch, for it will take both his arms to get her out, and there is nothing to tie his horse to, and it seems hardly desirable to give the bay the chance of careering round the field in emulation of that other riderless one. But "where there's a will there's a way," and, the couple in question having a very hearty will to release themselves from so embarrassing a predicament, the lady is ere long on terra firma. But in a woful plight! Her dainty feminine mind is sorely vexed as

she looks down upon the half that has been released,—little boots, nether garments, skirt, one cake of black mud. If it were not for shame's sake, the heroine of this ignoble incident would burst into tears.

Captain Clive is good tempered; the damsel is fair; he smiles at her encouragingly.

"It is very unfortunate," he says, "but the only thing is to make the best of it." As he speaks, he looks round for her horse, but it has gone off on its own account. This complicates matters very much indeed. "Are you far from home?" he asks, in some dismay.

"It must be quite four miles from The Towers," she says, sorrowfully, "and I do not think there is even the poorest cottage within a mile. And I am so stiff with this clay, I don't believe I could walk a yard."

"And this field would be bad walking under any circumstances," adds Captain Clive. "No; there is only one thing for it. I must put you on my horse and lead him to the nearest cottage."

"I am so ashamed! What can I say? What can I do? What *can* you think of me?"

The pretty troubled face does not appeal to the man's eyes and heart in vain.

"What can I think?" he answers, gallantly. "I think I am as fortunate as you are the reverse in this contre-temps Let me put you up!"

She looks down at his varnished boots that are almost as unsuitable as her own for the proposed pilgrimage.

"You are too kind," she falters; then, desperately, "oh, I never, never will do anything wrong again in my life."

"I cannot say Amen to that," says the young soldier, still in the same gallant frame of mind. Truth to tell, he no longer regrets the vanished hunt. And indeed so charming a face might compensate a more eager Nimrod than Captain Clive for a lost run.

Having soothed and quieted the bay, he takes the reluctant and muddy little foot in his hand and lifts the fair one to the saddle. The habit brushes and besmirches his scarlet coat, adding another pang to the penitent's remorse, but his good humor is imperturbable. And, taking the surprised bay by the bridle, he leads him for a mile and a half through mire

and slush to the nearest farm-house, and I think even the fair dame of Coventry could not have felt one whit more frightened and ashamed than Viva Carlton did on that disastrous ride. There was not much opportunity for conversation by the road, for Captain Clive had his work cut out in picking his way and soothing the injured feelings of the bay, and the fair one was too overwhelmed with shame and confusion to find much company talk.

"And now," he said, when he had lifted her down, thereby adding another memento to his coat, "I will ride to The Towers and tell them to send a carriage for you at once. I presume I have the honor of speaking to Miss Carlton."

She makes an affirmative sign, and, blushing vividly, says,—

"How can I thank you? I shall never forget you as long as I live!" and then she adds, with a return of her natural vivacity, "but I hope I shall never see you again."

He smiles.

"I venture to prophesy that you will," he answers, and mounting, he salutes her and rides away.

But Captain Clive was too confident: he never saw Miss Carlton again: when he called a few days later to inquire after her, she had left for Paris the previous day, and he had to be content with the hearty thanks of her uncle.

He was unfeignedly chagrined for the moment; but there were so many bright eyes in the world, and most of them were so pleased to put forth their lustre for the benefit of the young soldier, that it is scarcely to be wondered at if one particular pair soon faded into a dim corner of his memory.

But to-night they are shining out again, more beautiful and lustrous, it seems to him, than any that have irradiated his life between this and then. It is the same face, but far lovelier, for the soul has awakened in it.

When Captain Clive returns to the palace, the theatricals are over, the Emperor and Empress have retired, the Duchesse de Lallière has disappeared also: the party in general shows signs of breaking up. Captain Clive mounts to the smoking-room, where he finds the duke the centre of an animated group. The talk is of racing, and, as Alsager approaches, the duke turns to appeal to him about the pedigree of an English horse. He joins the group and gives the desired information. Presently he and the duke are left alone together. Captain

Clive would like to make some flattering remark to the husband upon the wife's talent for impersonation, but words that are wont to fall readily from lips trained to courteous utterances somehow fail him to-night: he feels more awkward and embarrassed with the duke than he ever remembers to have felt with a man in his life. Not, heaven knows, that he has any thought of the fair duchess that, were his breast an open book, the husband might not read: his feeling for her is one of the most exalted admiration. At last with considerable diffidence he brings the conversation round to the tableaux vivants, and is disgusted with himself for the commonplace remark which is all that offers itself to his mind upon the occasion.

"Mon Dieu!" laughs the duke, gayly, "my wife astonished me. Would you not say I had given her cause for much grief on seeing her assume such a natural despair? She has a great talent for acting."

"I have had the honor of seeing Madame la Duchesse before," says Alsager. "It was on an occasion when she was suffering from a real chagrin, though not of a very serious nature." And he tells the story of the November morning's escapade.

The duke laughs heartily.

"She will thank you again to-morrow for your good offices. There is a stag-hunt, as of course you know. My wife and I both mean to follow. You will be there?"

Alsager answers in the affirmative, and shortly afterwards they bid each other good-night with a cordial English handshake. The duke has a great regard for British habits and customs.

Captain Clive goes to his room, and, having dismissed his servant, draws an easy-chair to the fire, lights a cigar, and falls into a revery.

The evenings are cold: the royal logs that blaze in the wide chimney are welcome: they throw a warm light over the room and give that air of comfort which always seems wanting without a fire. The room is hung in pale-colored stuff embroidered in large crimson flowers; the handsome furniture is mahogany, and the china, Sèvres, marked with the imperial cipher.

Captain Clive is as unconscious of detail as the majority of

his sex: the general effect is agreeable to him, and aids him to fall into a revery of considerable duration. He is thinking a good deal about the Duc de Lallière, a great deal more about the duchess.

How came this fresh young English girl to be transplanted to the French court? Was it ambition that united her to a foreigner, a man at least twenty years older than herself, or was this was one of the freaks in which love delights? And what was the duchess's history? He knew that she was niece to Mr. Carlton of The Towers, and that she had frequently stayed with him; but where had she spent the rest of her time? In France, no doubt: otherwise it would be impossible to account for her perfect knowledge of the French language. And she must have mixed with the first society: Alsager, no mean judge of such matters, had recognized perfectly behind the gay, almost coquettish manner in vogue at the imperial court, the refinement, the distinguished air of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Captain Clive decides that this has been a *mariage de convenance*,—one that has evidently turned out well,—so far at least. But he has a great curiosity to know whether a man of the duke's calibre, genial, superficial, devoted to the material part of life, is calculated to satisfy a woman who so obviously possesses a soul and the capacity for deep feeling as the duchess. Is she happy? Certainly, if one may judge by outward appearances. Her gayety is natural, unforced; there are no lurking traitor lines near eyes or mouth to tell of hidden griefs or unfilled longings; her entourage is one calculated to satisfy even an ambitious woman. *If* she loves her husband, Alsager can find no flaw in her happiness. But he is so much older than she is! French husbands after the first twelve months are not often uxorious.

Alsager's cigar burns the end of his nose, and he goes to bed.

His first waking thought in the morning is a hope that the day will be fine: he is looking forward eagerly to the stag-hunt, not because he particularly affects the popular sport at Compiègne, but because he is to be presented to the duchess. He cannot call to mind that in his life, ardent admirer as he has always been of the fair, he was ever so anxious to make or rather renew his acquaintance with one of them before.

He goes to the window and looks out. His aspirations are crowned: the day is fair. But, having ascertained this fact, he yet lingers, as he well may. Before him stretches the forest like a sea,—wave upon wave of mighty tree-tops rolling to the far horizon, swaying and surging gently in the freshening breeze. Beneath the pale sun of the early October morning they glow like a purple, gold-broidered mantle, reaching from one end of heaven to the other.

"It is nine o'clock: breakfast is fixed for half-past ten, half an hour earlier than usual. Captain Clive sips his chocolate, dresses at leisure, and saunters out on the terrace. The duke is there before him.

"Have you been over the stables?" he asks Alsager, to whom he has taken a great fancy. "Come with me and see what you are going to ride." And, nothing loath, Captain Clive follows him. The duke is evidently a great luminary in the imperial stables.

At half-past eleven, the Emperor and Empress, and those of their guests who are so disposed, leave the castle, some in *chars-à-banc*, some on horseback. The Emperor rides, the Empress drives: she is not going to follow to-day. The meet is at Puits du Roi,—an immense cross-road in the heart of the forest. It would be difficult to imagine a more picturesque sight than the one which presents itself to Captain Clive's view as he rides up to the place of rendezvous. Mounted piqueurs in red breeches and gold-laced hats; valets-de-chiens in silver-buckled shoes, holding the hounds; facing them the carriages of guests from the neighboring châteaux drawn up in a semicircle, and groups of ladies, and men in the uniform of the imperial hunt, dispersed about. Among these, Alsager's quick eyes espy the duchess, and in a moment he is making his way towards her. As they come face to face the same thought flashes across each:

"No woman can touch an Englishwoman in the saddle!"

"No man in the world looks like an Englishman on horseback!"

## CHAPTER III.

### DÉSILLUSIONNÉE.

THE duchess separates herself from the group of which she is the centre, and comes forward.

"How do you do, Captain Clive?" And she reaches out her hand to him with a cordial grace, not waiting for her husband, who is beside her, to make a formal presentation. "So you have found out at last who I am!" she adds, with an arch smile.

"As if, having once seen, one could ever forget the Duchess de Lallière," he replies, bending over her hand.

"And yet," she says, with a merry glance, "your eyes were saying all last night at dinner, 'Where on earth have I seen that woman before?'"

"Were they?" And Alsager smiles in answer to the bright eyes that are looking kindly at him. "I had hoped they were better bred. And the last time I saw you—By the way, duchess, do you remember what your parting words to me were?"

"Indeed I do," she answers, gayly. "They must have sounded very rude; but they were not rudely meant. I said I hoped I should never see you again. Oh, I was so ashamed, so grievously ashamed! My cheeks tingled for a month every time I thought of that disastrous ride, and my uncle—— Hark!" (as the horns sound and the hounds begin to bark furiously) "the stag is loose. Au revoir. To-day at all events I am not going to spoil your sport." And she reins in that he may pass her.

"Duchess," he says eagerly,—more eagerly than so popular a man with the fair as Captain Clive is wont to plead,—"if I was once so fortunate as to be of some slight service to you, won't you reward me by letting me be your escort to-day?"

"It would be a shame," she answers, shaking her head.

"No! you and the duke shall have your sport: there is more than one of these beautifully got-up cavaliers who will be only too grateful for an excuse to look after a woman."

"I will not press myself upon you," says Alsager, showing unmistakably in his face the disappointment he feels.

"Come, then. If you are serious, I accept," laughs the duchess, putting her horse into a gallop, and away they go at a royal pace down the stately glade.

The stag gives them an exciting run; there is little opportunity for conversation, but the two, well mounted, confident, full of the flush of health and pleasure, are filled with a great sense of *bien-être* as they fly side by side through the magnificent and seemingly interminable alleys.

The hunt is over; the stag is dead, after making a gallant stand: the few who have followed to the end are straggling homewards; among these are Alsager and the duchess.

"At all events, I did not spoil your run to-day," she says, turning to him with a little triumphant smile. "This is quite a different conclusion from that ever-to-be-lamented ride to hounds."

"Why do you say that," he cries, eagerly,—"when it was one of the happiest days of my life?"

At this moment he genuinely thinks it must have been. His eyes are so eloquent, the duchess is forced to turn away, but she rallies him with all the vivacity of a Frenchwoman accustomed to exaggerated compliments.

"The happiest day of your life!" she laughs: "wading knee-deep in a ploughed field, with a muddy coat, and a damsel in tears (I believe I cried) clinging on like grim death to your outraged hunter. Some day you must tell me about the unhappiest one, if that was the happiest. My uncle teases me about it to this day. He declared he would change my name from Viva to Eva."

"Viva? is that your name?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"It is charming."

"Shall I tell you the origin of it?"

"If you will," and Alsager bends nearer to listen.

"You must know, then, my real name is Geneviève. When I went to England as a child, my English uncle translated it into Genoveva, after the heroine of some favorite poem of his.

This, being inconveniently long, soon dropped into Veva. One day, when I was about seven, I saw the word Viva in a newspaper, and asked Uncle Bernard its meaning. 'It is a word of welcome,' he said, 'a word the people shout when they are glad, when they hail a sovereign, or some person they delight to honor.' 'Then I will be called Viva,' I exclaimed; and he laughed, and said, 'So be it!' and from that day to this I have been called Viva, and unless some one seems to find it strange I rarely even remember the origin of my name."

"But you are English really?" asks Alsager, feeling that he cannot bear any nation but his own to claim this charming creature.

"Oh, I am half and half," she answers, laughing; "but I think I am most English, because I believe so much in everything English. That is an unmistakable sign, is it not?"

"Unmistakable," he answers, joining in the laugh.

"My father was English, and my mother French. Both died before I can remember. But I have had such a happy life, I have nothing to regret. My grandmother, the Marquise de Feuil, brought me up principally, and she believes in nothing but the Faubourg Saint-Germain; but my uncle, Mr. Carlton, has a great regard for the Emperor, who used to stay at The Towers before he came to the throne, so I was a good deal at the court even before my marriage. Then I used frequently to stay in England, and actually made my first appearance in society in London. Indeed, it was there I met my husband."

"Tell me, duchess," says Captain Clive, looking curiously at his lovely companion: "you said just now your life has been so happy. Pardon me if I seem impertinent, but how is it possible if you have not known sorrow that you could simulate it so painfully well as you did last night?"

"It is a mystery to me," answers the duchess, simply. "I suppose I looked the part, since every one says so, but I cannot tell how I looked. It was D——'s doing. From the first it was proposed that I should personate Joy. That was natural enough. I always feel bright and happy: they tell me I look so. Then there was great question who should be Sorrow. A dozen were named, but D—— shook his head. One day he asked me to come for a moment to his room with

the duke. When we were there (he is a little spoiled and strange, you know), he pushed open the door of his dressing-room, and said, 'M. le Duc, you will find several objects to amuse you in there: be so kind as to leave Madame with me.' And the duke, who is very good-natured, laughed and went in, and D—— shut the door.

"For two or three moments he took no notice of me, but looked at one or two pictures and shifted them to a different light; then he turned suddenly, and said,—

"'Duchess, I have made up my mind that you shall take the part of Sorrow.'

"'I!' I exclaimed, petrified with astonishment.

"'Yes,' he answered, composedly. 'You have, perhaps without being aware of it, an immense imagination. It is not, as some people believe, necessary to have felt a great sorrow to be able to depict it: it is sufficient that you can imagine it. Men and women have been stricken to the heart ere now without betraying their agony in a line of their faces. Be so good as to sit here.' And he placed me a chair near the window lookout over the forest. 'I want you to forget the present, to forget your own life, and to fancy that, instead of being admired and beloved as you are, you are without a friend in the world, that the man you have loved with your whole soul has betrayed you, that you are despised and forgotten by all, that you have offended heaven and dare not ask for hope or comfort there, that in the wide world there is no human being to whose heart you can turn for love or sympathy. You know the story of La Vallière. Fancy you are she when she left the king for the second time and he did not recall her.'

"And, as he spoke, he followed my husband into the other room and shut the door behind him. I do not know how it was, but his words, and the voice in which he spoke them, produced a strange effect upon me. The story of La Vallière always had a singular fascination for me. I recalled the scene of which I had so often read: for the moment I involuntarily fancied myself the poor deserted broken-hearted Louise. I was in a deep revery when suddenly the door re-opened, and D—— came towards me smiling.

"'Brava, madame!' he said. 'I am not often mistaken. I took a base advantage to watch you through a chink I made expressly in my wall. Let your thoughts run in the same

groove on the night of the tableaux, and I predict not only a success but a sensation.' I refused at first; I was opposed to making a travesty of a broken heart; but the duke joined his persuasions to those of D——, and," adds the duchess, sighing, "I yielded."

"I wish you had not," said Alsager, looking fixedly at her.

"Why?"

"Because nothing but what is fair and bright and glad should ever be connected with you. Now, when those who saw you last night think of you, they will never be able to forget the sorrowful look you wore."

"People have not such good memories as you give them credit for. The impression, if I made one, will soon be replaced by a new one. To-night we are to have a *curée froide*, and afterwards a dance."

"Will you honor me by giving me a waltz?" says Alsager, eagerly.

"Certainly I will. I always like to dance with an Englishman."

Here they are joined by the duke.

At five o'clock Captain Clive received an invitation to drink tea in the Empress's apartments. When he entered the room, the Duchesse de Lallière was seated on a sofa beside her Majesty, giving her an animated account of the run. The Empress sent for Captain Clive, talked very graciously to him about England and horses, asked after some of his friends whom she had met when in London, and delighted him by her gracious tact and kindness. In Alsager's opinion the Château de Compiègne held at this moment the two most charming women in the world. Other men approached in their turn; the conversation became general; one gave the latest details of a *cause célèbre* that was going on, another whispered a new scandal · presently an Italian went to the piano and sang some delicious songs. He was followed by the Comte de B——, who had a talent for improvising and made some very neat compliments to the ladies of the company in his song.

At dinner, Captain Clive again manœuvred to sit where he could see the duchess. To-night she was not next the Emperor (one of the imperial princesses had arrived), but was placed between two high dignitaries. Alsager had elected to

take in a French countess, neither very young nor lovely, for the sole purpose of talking and hearing about the duchess. His companion showed every disposition to gratify him.

"Oh, yes, she is charming, our little duchess," she remarks, in answer to an observation of his. "Some of us wondered a little at her choosing the duke, who is only of the First Empire; but he is enormously rich, and is very fairly received by the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"You wondered at the marriage on account of the disparity in age?" says Alsager, interrogatively.

"Mon Dieu, no!" replies Madame de L——, with vivacity; "if he had been twenty years older that would have been no objection: you know in France we do not hold your romantic views about marriage. But Madame de Feuil, the grandmother of the duchess, is so proud,—proud as she is poor."

"Madame de Feuil is of old family?" asks Captain Clive.

"She is marquise: that speaks for itself. As you doubtless know, monsieur, no marquis has been created since Molière. But the De Feuils date from long before Molière: they are quite of the *vieille roche*. However, it was an excellent marriage; and I think Madame de Feuil showed great sense in not opposing it."

"Then it was a love-match? The duchess married the duke from choice?"

"But without doubt. It was rumored that neither her English uncle nor her grandmother were altogether in favor of the marriage."

"But the duke seems amiable and agreeable: he evidently holds a high position at this court?"

"*Parfaitement:* he is much liked: he has a charming manner, and has always had a great success with women."

"And he fell desperately in love with Miss Carlton," says Alsager, to whom this seems a natural and very comprehensible idea.

His interlocutor gives him a shrewd glance.

"Well, no," she answers: "I should not say *desperately*."

Captain Clive's eyes betray all the astonishment he feels.

"Does it seem so impossible to you that a man could be chosen by the duchess without being *desperately* in love with her in return?" asks Madame de L——, with a malicious little smile. "I assure you I have known men who were neither

young nor rich nor handsome married to beautiful women and yet the love was not on their side."

"Why did he marry her, then?" says Alsager, almost indignant, and completely mystified.

"I might fear to be indiscreet," she answers, dropping her voice, "but that the story is so well known. You ask why he married her? He wished to ally himself with a good family, and——"

"And?" echoes Alsager, eagerly.

"He wished that little affair about Madame de Marsal to be forgotten."

"Madame de Marsal?"

"Yes: she arrived to-day. That is she with the magnificent diamond coronet,—the second lady on his Majesty's left."

"But she is not young," says Alsager, after one glance.

"No," replies Madame de L——, with some coldness. "Ah! I have heard that *beauté de diable* is the only beauty Englishmen care for."

Captain Clive sees his error, and hastens to repair it.

"I am not one of those," he answers. "There are few women who do not in my opinion grow more charming as they grow older. What they lose in youth, they gain in tact and the art of pleasing."

Madame de L—— is appeased.

"Madame de Marsal is one of those," she says. "There are few women at this court who would not tremble to have her for a rival even now. You did not remark, perhaps, how pale our young duchess became when she entered the room. Even the duke, self-possessed as he is, looked hardly at his ease. It is the first time he has seen her since his marriage."

"And he was in love with her before?"

"People pretended so. The duke and M. Marsal had a dispute,—about cards, of course,—and there was a duel. M. de Marsal was wounded in the arm. He is travelling in America now."

Captain Clive looks over at the duchess. It may be only fancy, consequent upon what he has just heard, but it seems to him that her gayety is not so spontaneous to-night,—that there is an anxious look in her lovely eyes. He glances from her to Madame de Marsal, and his soul is filled with wonder as men's souls are sometimes when they look from the woman who seems

to them all that is fair and desirable to the woman who is her rival.

When dinner is over, the guests repair to the windows overlooking the court-yard where the *curée* is to take place. Some score of privileged persons follow the imperial party to the centre balcony. Captain Clive is honored by an invitation to make one of them. It is a weird, striking scene which the guests are summoned to witness. The night is dark, but hundreds of torches of colored flame light up the court-yard and bring into prominence the hounds barking and jostling each other against the railing, the men in rich liveries, and the expectant crowd of the Compiègne bourgeoisie. The remains of the stag were placed in front of the portico, covered by the head and skin, and the chief huntsman stood ready with his whip to give the sign for the hounds to rush to their feast. The Emperor gave a signal, the huntsman lowered his whip, the dogs bounded forward with frantic yells, but their prey was not to be so easily gained. The whip was raised, and they halted in mid-career, crouching, and foaming with impatience and fury.

Twice was this repeated. The third time they were allowed to fling themselves unchecked on their meal. Then came the cracking of bones, the low growls of savage pleasure, the fighting over tit-bits, and the orgy was in full swing. The piqueurs sounded a fanfaronade, torches were waved, a sea of red fire illumined the court-yard: altogether, it seemed rather like a glimpse of the infernal regions.

"Not a very edifying or ennobling sight," said Captain Clive in a low voice to the English ambassador, near whom he was standing.

"It is a thing to see," was the reply.

"Once," assented Alsager; and his eyes wandered in search of the duchess. She was talking to the Emperor, but every moment her eyes strayed to the duke, who was leaning over Madame de Marsal. Alsager turned to watch too. The lady was conversing apparently in an indifferent manner, but once she raised her eyes and gave one long look into the duke's. It was very expressive.

An uncomplimentary word was smothered between Alsager's teeth.

"She is dangerous," he thought, and turned suddenly to

see if the duchess had been witness of the look. He met her eyes, and they had an unconscious piteous air of appeal in them. Alsager's heart throbbed; a red flush came into his face. He would give his right hand to make the duchess happy. He felt a vindictive desire to strangle her rival. Her rival! What a besotted fool that Frenchman must be! How could a man of the world like Bernard Carlton give this fair young creature to such a man, to have her heart broken by his cursed infidelities!

Men are so down on those iniquities in others that they are most prone to themselves. How David's soul was fired by Nathan's story of the ewe lamb!

The dancing has commenced. All through dinner, all through the spectacle afterwards, Alsager has been thinking of the moment when he will approach the duchess to claim his promised waltz.

As he enters the ball-room, he sees her surrounded by a crowd of men, all eagerly pressing their claims. A quadrille is about to commence: she rises, and takes the arm of her partner.

"The next is yours," she whispers to Alsager, with a charming smile, as she passes him. He does not dance this time, but stands watching her. Every hour makes her more gracious in his eyes, every new thing she does seems to lend her an additional charm.

At last the moment has come: her hand lies upon his arm, the soft strains of the music are thrilling through his brain; he can hear his heart beat. But he is saying to himself that what he feels is intense sympathy,—that he would give the world to be her brother.

Now they are floating down the room as though the polished floor were a cloud. They move together as if one will, one soul animated them; the flush of pleasure is on both their faces; for this moment, at least, Madame de Marsal is forgotten.

"That was perfect," whispers the duchess, as they pause, her deep-blue eyes kindling with pleasure and excitement. "There is nothing in the world like a waltz when all the *agréments* are perfect."

"I wish it could last forever," is on Alsager's lips; but he checks himself. And, as he is afraid to trust himself with

words, he is silent. "Shall we go on?" the duchess says, presently; and he puts his arm again round her slender waist. Once more they are in a short Paradise together, once more the music thrills their senses and their swift feet fly rhythmically to its strains, and then—it is over, and they are walking quietly out of the ball-room in the train of a dozen other couples. Alsager sees the duchess's eyes wandering hither and thither, and well conjectures their quest: he tries to stifle the pang that shoots through his heart. They pass from one salon to another; and presently, at the end of the corridor, they come to a room, the door of which, instead of being wide open like the rest, is partly closed. What instinct makes the duchess push it open? what reason makes Alsager desire to prevent her doing so?

They know soon enough.

Its only occupants are the Duke de Lallière and Madame de Marsal. He is bending over her, and she appears deeply agitated. Quick as lightning the duchess draws back: Alsager feels her hand tremble convulsively upon his arm. For a moment her dark eyes glance at him with the look of a startled fawn; then, suddenly, she recovers herself, and says, with a smile, but so wan a smile it goes to his heart,—

"The music is beginning, and I have promised to dance with Prince M——."

He knows not how it is, but he has no courage to ask her to dance with him again, as he has been longing to do ever since he released her slight form from his reluctant arm. And he is not surprised when, after the next dance, she disappears.

The duchess goes to her apartments. Her faithful maid and foster-sister Désirée is awaiting her. Not even to her can she hint at this new trouble that has fallen upon her like a thunderbolt.

"Madame la Duchesse is pale: she is overtired," says Désirée, anxiously.

"I think I am, my good Désirée. I have done a great deal to-day." And she affects to stifle a yawn, although she is so wide awake she feels as though no sleep will visit her eyelids to-night. With swift and tender hands, Désirée disrobes her and combs out her long hair, looking from time to time solicitously at the fair, loved face. It is so strange for her mistress to have nothing to tell her about her evening.

The duchess lets herself be put to bed, that she may not awaken Désirée's suspicions.

"Good-night, ma bonne!" she says, gently.

"May I not stay with Madame until M. le Duc comes?" asks Désirée, lingering.

"No, my good Désirée: it is late. Good-night."

But when her maid is gone, she draws a wrapper round her and throws herself into an arm-chair near the fire. There is a strange pain gnawing at her heart,—a pain that is new and bitter to her,—doubt. Has a blight fallen upon her life that has been so fair until now? A superstitious terror creeps over her. "Why did I play at sorrow?" she cries to herself. "I tried to feel it, to imagine it, and now is it coming to me unbidden? Oh, if my husband should still love that woman! if she is going to take his heart from me! Oh, God! what should I do? O Mary! mother of God! have pity upon me!" And she sinks on her knees and bursts into bitter weeping. After a time she recovers herself, and, leaning back in her chair, falls into a long revery. It is perhaps an hour before the handle of the door turns and the duke comes in.

"What made you retire so early, ma belle?" he asks, gayly, coming towards her,—"you who are such an indefatigable dancer? I could scarcely believe you had left the ball-room."

The duchess rises and puts out both her hands to him. There is a smile on her sweet face,—a look that is not reproachful nor accusing: it is the candid smile of a loving woman.

"Victor!" she says, and, pushing him gently into the chair from which she has risen, she seats herself at his feet. She looks like some lovely pictured angel in her white robe: the sleeves have fallen back, and show the beautiful arms that are clasped tenderly upon her husband's knees; the firelight irradiates her fair face and gives a deeper glow to her dark eyes; there is the earnestness of deep feeling in her expressive face. She speaks to him in French; her utterance is rapid, there is an accent of strong emotion in her tremulous voice.

She looks very young and fair: the duke is by no means insensible to her charms: he stoops and kisses her on either cheek.

"You love your Viva, is it not so?" murmurs the young duchess, twining her fingers in his; "you married me because

you loved me; and I—dear Victor, I love you with all my heart. I would not that ours should be a marriage like so many that we see, where the husband and wife have but a cold indifferent civility for each other: I would have all your heart and give you all mine. You will scold me, you will laugh at me, you will even perhaps be angry with me, but I can bear all, all, sooner than doubt you for one little moment. I know, my friend, that before our marriage you admired Madame de Marsal. Nay, think not I accuse you of any wrong! She was married, and I believe you too noble to have unlawful, unhallowed thoughts of one who was the wife of another. But to-night,—oh, Victor, forgive me!—when I saw you together, when I saw the looks she cast on you, it tormented me; I suffered cruelly. I never knew until that moment that I was capable of jealousy. You see," adds the young duchess, her eyes filling with tears, and her voice taking a strangely pathetic tone, "I have always been first with my dear ones. And I shall be always with you, shall I not, my Victor?" And she clasps his hand tenderly.

But the duke is vexed. His eyes are wandering and cold: this lovely pleading young face does not touch his heart: the only one that has ever done that is one much older, an artificial face,—the face of a heartless, thorough-paced coquette, which can yet persuade him that the tenderest, most passionate soul in the world lies behind it. Viva looks up at him and waits with a mute agony of longing for his answer.

"I do not care for the court; I do not care for gayety," she pleads. "I would leave it to-morrow, so that I might be all in all to you and you to me."

"Ma chère," replies the duke at last, in a cold tone, carefully avoiding her eyes, "you do me a great honor. I feel flattered; but pardon me if I say that these high-flown (*exaltées*) ideas seem more suitable to a school-girl than to a married woman, a woman of the world, a duchess. I am proud of your affection, I trust I am not unworthy of it, but it seems to me there are other things in life for people in our position than '*filer le parfait amour*.' All that I have is yours; my confidence in you is unbounded. Amuse yourself, be happy; I put no restraint upon your pleasures, your expenditure; I only ask in return that you shall not vex me by a display of jealousy whose only end would be to make us both

ridiculous. Scenes are fatiguing; and, believe me, they do more to alienate the affection of a husband than anything in the world. Good-night, ma belle" (rising): "you are not yourself to-night. Sleep well, and to-morrow I hope to see you as radiant and as smiling as always."

The duke goes out, and the duchess, with a set white face, sits watching the red embers on the hearth. It is indeed an agonizing pain when a tender human heart feels itself turning to stone.

* * * * * * *

But hers is not the only aching heart in the palace. Here in this golden cage of Compiègne, where there is so much magnificence and luxury, so much of the pomp and pride of life, there are poor birds beating their wings against the gilded bars. And the bars hurt none the less because they are of gold.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT THE "VAUDEVILLE."

THE Duc de Lallière is neither cruel nor vicious. He does not love his fair young wife: that is why her words chafe instead of delighting him. What could be so sweet, so dear to a man as to have the arms of the woman he loves around him, her heart beating against his, her dear lips telling him that he is all in all to her! But if it be not the one for whom his passion stirs, not the one who has the power to quicken every fibre of his heart, to make "the world well lost" if she be gained, why, then—then her arms might as well be blocks of wood, her heart-beats the ticking of a clock, her love-whispers the soughing of a wintry wind among dead leaves. And Fates so often will sit thus! The tokens of love that leave one man unresponsive, that chill rather than kindle him, would turn the blood of some other to fire, but they are not given to him, at least not by the woman from whom he covets them. And often with a man it is that only which cannot be his for which he is ready to lay down honor, ambition, even life itself.

Sometimes, but far more seldom, it is so with women. But they, they dig a hole and bury their passion fathoms deep and let the grass grow green upon it: then they rise up and go about the business of their lives again with a brave smile. Their skeleton is double-locked in his closet, and they press the iron key tight against their tender breasts.

The story that Captain Clive heard from his French neighbor's lips at dinner was virtually true. The Duc de Lallière married his wife because he was anxious to ally himself with good blood, and Viva Carlton came jointly from a French family and an English one that could trace unblemished descent through many generations.

As for the De Lallières, the less said about their family tree before the first Napoleon made the present man's grandfather duke and peer, the better. "It takes three generations to make a gentleman,"—so runs the saying. There is no better bred or mannered man at the French court than the Duc de Lallière: the Faubourg Saint-Germain might adopt him almost without a qualm. Fortune was liberal to him in every way: without being strictly handsome or clever, he had looks and brains enough to make an excellent figure in his world; he was rich; he loved sport; women favored him: what more gifts need he ask at the hands of the gods? A time came when it seemed to him that a beautiful wife would add to his dignity,—that an heir to the De Lallières with blue blood flowing from his mother's veins was a thing to be desired.

The duke had Anglomania: everything English found favor in his eyes: he was devoted to English sports: his horses were English, his grooms English, his carriages were by Peters, his clothes by Poole, his guns by Purdy, even his boots, most wonderful to relate, were by an English maker. But a wife was another matter: he did not know how far an Englishwoman would suit him: they were dignified, modest, admirable wives and mothers, but they were cold, and, as a rule, more domestic than social. The duke desired that his wife should shine at court and in society; that her charms should irradiate him and make him an object of envy and wonder to the world. He was disposed to be perfectly indulgent, to surround his wife with every luxury, in short, to make Madame la Duchesse de Lallière a cynosure for the world's eyes to rest upon. And

there was another consideration. People were talking about his attentions to Madame de Marsal: for her sake it would be good to hush slanderous tongues by marrying. The duke went to England to look round him, and met his fate in Viva Carlton. He found her charming: she combined the vivacity, the piquancy of a Frenchwoman with the modest dignity of an Englishwoman. She had no fortune: her father had spent what property he had, and was entirely dependent upon Bernard Carlton, his elder brother, long before he met and fell in love with Mademoiselle Geneviève de Feuil. But the young lady's parents, having a higher destiny in view for her, treated the pretensions of Charles Carlton with extreme coldness. Then the young people took the law into their own hands, and one fine morning the young lady disappeared. So there were no settlements, no provision for their possible descendants; and Mr. and Mrs. Carlton lived on the liberal allowance made them by the master of The Towers.

But the duke was generous; it pleased him to confer everything: he would even have objected when Mr. Carlton proposed to settle ten thousand pounds upon his niece on her marriage. He set himself the task of making Viva love him. It was one he had practised so often and so successfully with her sex that he had little fear of failure. The blind goddess favored him again: perhaps she peeped under her bandage and saw that it was her old favorite whom she had befriended so often. She must cheat sometimes, I think, or she would not smile so invariably on some people and frown so resolutely on others. Viva gave him her heart: he fascinated her: the disparity in their ages was even pleasing to her: she infinitely preferred a grave, dignified man of the world to the young men about her whom she was pleased to consider coxcombs. Her uncle, Mr. Carlton, was surprised at her choice,—more surprised than pleased: he wanted her to marry an Englishman, and was considerably disappointed because she elected to become a French duchess rather than an English countess, of which the opportunity was offered her. Truth to tell, he would rather have seen her plain Mrs. in his own country than "Madame la Duchesse" in France. However, he did not consider himself entitled to oppose her wishes, if love, not ambition, dictated them.

"My dear child," he said, taking both her hands and look

ing with his penetrating eyes into the deep clear wells of hers, "*are you sure* you love the duke?"

Viva blushed, and looked away, as is the wont of a modest woman when a question of such a nature is put to her.

"Are you quite sure, my dear, that you are not a little dazzled by the prospect of all that M. de Lallière has to offer you?"

This time indignation deepens the carnation that modesty has painted on the fair cheeks.

"I am quite sure," she says, trying to steady the tremor in her voice, and looking at her uncle with eyes whose truth he would stake his life upon. "*I am quite sure* that I love Victor *for himself*."

"Then, my love," responds Bernard Carlton, releasing her hands and trying to repress the disappointment he feels, "there is nothing for me to say but God bless you! and I hope you will be very happy."

So Viva married the duke. And if he had only known it, what a treasure he had won! What a mine of wealth was that fresh young heart! how full of love, of tenderness, of sympathy! But the owner of that mine never cared to explore the hidden depths that would have made him rich indeed: he was fond of Viva, proud of her, but she did not stir his heart of hearts; it was only Pauline de Marsal who could do that. When he married, the duke did his best to forget the woman who had so powerful and baneful an influence over him: he meant to be true in the spirit as in the letter to his young wife, and, until to-night, he had been fairly successful in his efforts to drop her out of his life. But to-night he was forced to acknowledge to himself that his long struggle had been fruitless, that when her eyes looked into his with the old fire, all his resolves, all his strength, all his soul, melted before them and left him as much her slave as in the days gone by.

And that was all Pauline de Marsal cared for. She had heard of the duke's marriage, of Viva's charms, of his apparent devotion to her, and she said, setting her small white teeth, "We shall see who is the stronger, the duchess or I!" and to-night the victory had been with her, and she was satisfied. If she had ever really loved the duke, I know not; vanity, not love, was her motive spring; but now all feeling

for him had died out; she had a fresh victim, and when she had proved her power to the duke, the duchess, and the world, she had done with him forever. But the duke could not guess this. Whilst his young duchess sat heart-broken over the dying embers, he tossed to and fro on his miserable couch, scarcely less wretched than she. His heart condemned him; but he had never bridled his passions: self-sacrifice was of all virtues the most impossible to him.

And Viva! all that was fair and bright seemed to have gone out of her life forever, now that she knew her husband did not love her. How was she to bear life through all the long weary years that stretched into the vista of the future,—years without love? To such a heart as Viva's, death seemed less cruel. She was capable of deepest, intensest love,—nay, her soul craved it. When she married the duke, she asked nothing better than to shower upon him the lavish treasure of her affection; but she was sensitive and timid, as a modest woman who loves is wont to be; she knows intuitively that demonstrations should begin with the man; if he withholds them, her heart shrinks back upon itself. And so it was with Viva: she longed for a more perfect sympathy between her husband and herself; not that she doubted his love,—he was kindness itself,—but she had begun to believe that he had passed the age when passion plays the greatest part in a man's life, and that graver cares and interests had usurped its place. But to-night the bitter truth stands revealed to her in all its cruel nakedness: it is not the capacity for love the duke lacks, it is that she herself is powerless to call it forth.

As she sits and thinks, all hope dies away in her. Madame de Marsal is not young nor beautiful: so much the greater her power, so much the deeper rooted her influence! When a man loves a woman who is not possessed of the attributes that are commonly held so dangerous, youth and beauty, she who would rival her has indeed a hard task before her. For youth is fleeting and beauty perishable, and, even while they last, a man may suffer satiety of them; but there are charms and graces that "age cannot wither," "nor custom stale."

I know plain women whose husbands adore them, who feel a perfect security in the hearts *they know* beat for them alone;

I know pretty, very pretty women who seem to inspire little but disgust and contempt in the breasts of their lords, who fly gladly from them to women without a tithe of their attractions, and whose wonder at the admiration their wives excite in other men is only second to that they feel at ever having been fascinated themselves. Will it be given to any of us in the hereafter to know a love, true and pure and changeless, such as we have all dreamed of, such as now and then one of us has for a moment believed he grasped?

* * * * * * *

The duke and duchess are back in Paris. The duke, remorseful for the coldness with which he had received his wife's loving advances at Compiègne, redoubles his attentions to her, but they leave Viva cold and chill, now that she knows they do not spring from love. She is stricken at heart; the zest is gone out of her life; the future, spite of wealth, honors, gayety, holds out no hope, no promise, to her. And she is proud, —very proud: to have another woman preferred before her, a woman who she may tell herself without undue vanity is in every way her inferior, is bitter indeed.

It is a bright morning early in November, and she is in the boudoir of her hôtel in the Champs Elysées. The duke's wealth and love of ostentation, and her own taste, have made this a very elegant and sumptuous nest indeed. The walls are painted a pale creamy pink, the curtains are of white satin embroidered with pink roses and gold and silver leaves. In the centre of the polished, inlaid floor is a carpet deep and soft as moss, the color of the sky on a summer's day, garlanded with pale roses. On the mantel-piece of pure white marble supported by graceful caryatides are a clock and candelabra, miracles of Dresden art. Clusters of loves are climbing, embracing, falling, fighting up and down the porcelain trees, over and under the spreading branches. The mirrors hanging on the walls are framed in loves and flowers; charming cabinet pictures on ivory and porcelain mounted in velvet are grouped near them; great Dutch étagères in carved and gilded wood support a whole collection of rare and delicate china; two gigantic gold branches with sheaves of golden lilies and twining leaves hold innumerable wax-lights. It is so luxurious and costly a room that many a woman might feel *gênée* by its magnificence; but not Viva, who loves rich and beautiful things.

She is sitting before a low table: on her right is a basket of choice flowers, into which her little hand steals every moment to find a fresh beauty to add to the bouquets she is arranging in spiral glasses. She looks rather like a piece of choice porcelain herself, with her clear pale skin and deep-blue eyes set off by the morning robe of soft pink silk with ruffles of fine Valenciennes round her white throat and arms.

There is a low tap at the door, and Désirée enters with a bright smile.

"M. Carlton is here. Will Madame la Duchesse receive him in her boudoir?" And Viva jumps up delighted, and runs to meet him.

"Oh, my dear uncle. What a charming surprise! But how naughty of you not to let me know you were coming! Never mind! your room shall be ready for you almost at once."

Mr. Carlton kisses his niece in his quiet undemonstrative way, but there is a very sincere expression of affection and pleasure in his eyes as they rest upon her.

"I am at the Bristol, my dear. And I do not propose trespassing upon your hospitality this time."

"If you do not trespass upon mine," laughs Viva, "I shall trespass upon yours. Désirée, pack my things, and we will go and stay with my uncle at the Bristol."

Désirée laughs.

"Shall I give orders for Monsieur's luggage to be fetched immediately?" she asks; and the duchess answers, with vivacity,—

"At once! at once! And now," she cries, drawing him towards her boudoir, "tell me how it is you are here, and when you arrived, and why you came without letting me know." And she pushes him gently into a low chair and seats herself at his feet.

"I am here because they literally drove me out of The Towers," says Mr. Carlton. "Leighton and Weston have been quarrelling so desperately that I felt, unless I fled the house, I should have to get rid of one or both; and I am so used to them that I should be sorry to see a strange face in either of their places."

"How provoking of them! I am really quite out of patience with Weston. She professes to be so devoted to you,

she ought to have more consideration than to worry you in this way."

"Unfortunately, you see, my dear, it is that very devotion that is the stumbling-block. Jealousy, as usual, was the cause of the outbreak. If only they would not appeal to me and I did not suffer from their sulks, they might quarrel and fight to their hearts' content. I called them in just before starting.

"'You have so embittered my life and made me so thoroughly uncomfortable,' I remarked, 'that I am literally driven out of the house. That is the sole reason of my going. By the time I return, I hope you will have made up your minds to allow me for the future to have some peace and comfort in my home.'"

"And did they stand aghast? I am sure Leighton did. What did they say?"

"I did not give them time to reply. I jumped into the brougham and was off. When you have made your point, always go. If you don't give your opponent a chance of reply, you are bound to get the best of it. Well, and where is the duke?"

"He went off early this morning to shoot, and will not be back until late. Oh, I am so glad you have come!—we will have a charming little dinner. I have a new *chef*, who will delight your heart, and we will go to the theatre."

"By all means. Which shall it be?"

"They say there is a capital piece at the Vaudeville, where you die of laughter (I know you like to laugh at the theatre), and the women's toilets are something marvellous."

"And that will please you," rejoins her uncle. "Very well: if you insist on my being your guest, I will go and pay my bill at the Bristol, secure a box at the Vaudeville, and return to lunch."

"And this afternoon I will take you to see grandmamma. We will go in state in my new daumont: that will be charming."

Viva is so radiant with pleasure at seeing her uncle that the sorrowful expression which has been growing about her mouth and eyes lately vanishes. Mr. Carlton looks at her with pleasure: he sees nothing to make him suspect that there is a flaw in her happiness.

At three o'clock the daumont comes to the door. It is a

magnificent turnout: even the duke, who is not easily satisfied, thinks there is nothing in Paris to surpass it. It is his pleasure to see his elegant young wife driving in it whilst every passer-by turns to gaze after her. It is drawn by four matchless bays, ridden by two postilions in dark-blue velvet jackets, with white wigs and velvet caps. Two irreproachable footmen in powder sit behind.

"It is a proud position to be uncle to a duchess," observes Mr. Carlton, smiling, as they drive at a rapid pace down the Champs Elysées. "What a thing it is to be a woman and to have gifts that turn pumpkins into chariots and mice into prancing bays! Now, if you had been a boy, Viva, you would have had to make your way in the world by your own exertions, instead of stepping all at once into wealth and honors."

"Quite true, dear uncle; but——"

"But what, my child?"

"I am not sure that women have the best of it in this world."

"Not all women. But you,—you ought not to think that: you seem to be a mark for the gods to shower their gifts upon. You are happy, are you not? the duke——"

"The duke is very good," answers Viva, turning away to conceal a blush,—"most generous: he gives me everything that the most ambitious woman could desire."

"Ah!" thinks Mr. Carlton, a shade of sadness stealing over him, "is there a canker to this rose too? Why need I ask, though? Was there ever a flower yet in this world that one could swear was without a worm at the heart?"

They visit the Marquise de Feuil, a charming old lady, *grande dame* to the tips of her fingers, and afterwards they drive in the Bois. It is a lovely afternoon, and Viva is very gay and bright. They have a pleasant tête-à-tête dinner,—the duchess remembers to order all her uncle's favorite dishes,—then the coupé is at the door, and they drive off to the theatre. The play is amusing, the dresses magnificent. Viva is spending a very happy evening. The piece is half over, when Mr. Carlton utters a sudden exclamation:

"Surely that is the duke just come into the opposite box!"

He sees Viva turn deathly pale: at the same moment the duke catches sight of them, and makes an involuntary move-

ment backwards as if desirous not to be seen. But, instantly recovering himself, he comes forward and makes a cordial sign of greeting. Mr. Carlton returns it; but Viva, with compressed lips and fixed eyes, is looking at the stage. Yet she sees nothing, knows nothing, save that her husband is with Madame de Marsal and that the sight of herself has been an unwelcome surprise to him. She is too young, too inexperienced to think of concealing her pain, her jealous indignation, from her uncle, as a more worldly-wise woman would do. She cannot summon tact to her rescue, nor smile, nor make the effort to rob the situation of its embarrassing features. And Bernard Carlton, grieved at heart for her sake, sees this, and does the kindest thing he can,—leaves her to herself. There are three people at least in the theatre for whom the piece has lost all interest.

At the end of the act, the duke leaves Madame de Marsal and comes round to his wife's box. He and Mr. Carlton greet each other with more than usual effusiveness, though the former would as soon have seen Satan in person, and Viva's uncle feels bitterly angered against his nephew-in-law. But both are men of the world, both know how necessary it is to keep society out of one's confidence in domestic disturbances, and therefore play readily into each other's hands. The duke is wise enough not to attempt any excuse for his appearance at the theatre, and Mr. Carlton makes no comment upon it. The duchess has not vouchsafed the smallest notice to her husband; her face is fixed rigidly upon her fan; she has drawn slightly back from the front of the box. Presently the duke approaches her, and Mr. Carlton proceeds to survey the house through his glasses. The duke asks her, in a pleasant natural tone, if she is pleased with the piece; but she gives him no word of answer. Then he stoops towards her, and says, in a voice of cold displeasure,—

"Do you wish to have a scandal? Are you bent upon making us the talk of Paris?"

And she answers, with smothered passion, her eyes flashing,—

"If *you* insult and neglect me before the world, *I* will show the world that I do not submit to it tamely!"

The duke rises, and turns to Mr. Carlton.

"I leave Viva in your charge," he says, gayly. "I am off

to the Cercle, where I promised De B—— his revenge at écarté. Good-night!" And he goes.

Viva expects to see him return to Madame de Marsal; but he does not. The third act begins, and is played amidst peals of laughter.

But, had you asked them, neither Viva nor her uncle could have told you on the morrow a word that was said, though the eyes of both were turned to the stage.

This is what Mr. Carlton is thinking:

"I was right in judging that he was no husband for Viva, a girl full of heart and imagination. I knew that a selfish calculating man of the world must disappoint her, just as I knew she was too fresh and pure to inspire passion in him. But I certainly gave him credit for better taste than to parade his infidelity openly.

"I know nothing of the circumstances as yet, but when a man is in a position, to say the least of it, awkward, and makes no attempt to defend himself, it looks very bad indeed. Something must be done,—I will not stand by and see the child's heart broken,—but what?"

This problem engrosses him completely until it is time to go. Only a few commonplace remarks are uttered between uncle and niece until they reach the house and are alone in Viva's boudoir. The duchess throws herself into a chair and begins with a rapid motion to pull off her gloves. Her hands are trembling, her lips quivering. Mr. Carlton gathers that she means to confide in him. So, sinking into a chair beside her, he takes her hand, and says, tenderly,—

"Tell me all about it, my child."

Viva bursts into tears.

He waits patiently, once now and then stroking her little hand with tenderest sympathy. He knows these excitable, imaginative women can do nothing until they have rained away the first shock of their grief in a flood of tears.

"I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" she sobs, at last.

"Tell me, my dear," reiterates Bernard Carlton, gently. "Whom was the duke with to-night, and why does it make you so unhappy?"

And then, brokenly, the duchess tells her story.

"As far as you know, then," remarks her uncle, quietly, when she has finished, "the duke was attached to this Madame

de Marsal before you married him. He did not meet her again until you were all at Compiègne, when he paid her a certain amount of attention, and you are not aware that he has seen her between then and to-night."

"How do I know?" cries Viva, passionately. "He may have seen her every day. Is it likely that he would have been with her to-night unless they had resumed their old—position towards each other?"

"As a man of the world," replies her uncle, "I think it the duke had opportunities of seeing Madame de Marsal alone he would not run the risk of appearing with her in public. I fancy, too, that with her it is very much a question of vanity, and that in inducing him to show himself with her at the theatre to-night she had no other desire than to prove that her influence over him is not altogether destroyed."

"She may keep him and show him to the whole world as her slave," sobs Viva. "I will not stay another day with him. You will take me away to England to-morrow, dear Uncle Bernard, or I will return to grandmamma."

"My dear little girl," he answers, soothingly, "you must not take any step without grave consideration. For you to make an esclandre and leave the duke before you know that you have any just cause, would be to ruin every prospect of happiness for the future,—to embitter your whole life."

"What prospect of happiness have I?" sobs Viva. "My heart is broken."

"Child," says Bernard Carlton, in a low voice, pressing her hand tenderly, "no one can live in this world long and find life altogether fair; and, truth to tell, when I saw it so full of radiant promise for you I almost trembled. But, if your heart is disappointed, there are other things in life: you are surrounded by everything that women are most ambitious of; you say your husband is kind and indulgent, that it is his study to surround you with luxury and pleasures. Ah, my dear, there are many women who go about the world with smiling faces whose husbands are untrue to them and yet make no effort to atone for it by kindness and consideration, as the duke does. But come! nothing is proved: do you think if I had so charming a face as yours, I would yield to a *passée* painted rival like Madame de Marsal without striking a blow? Believe me, it would be a far greater triumph to win back your hus-

band's love by your sweetness and forbearance, by your own charms which ought to be potent enough for the task, than to give up all for lost and throw away your future. Trust to me. I will see the duke before I go to bed: it is possible that he may be able to explain away the events of to-night, and I am persuaded that he will do all in his power to avert a scandal. He may even propose to give up Madame de Marsal of himself. Only, Viva, for your own sake, I entreat of you not to let any one in the house suspect there is anything wrong between you and the duke. It is a hard lesson, to smile when you have the heartache, but it is a most needful one for those who live in the world to learn.

---

## CHAPTER V.

### A MAN OF THE WORLD.

Soon after Viva has retired, the duke comes in. He is quite prepared to find Mr. Carlton sitting up for him. A brief greeting is exchanged, then the latter enters at once upon his subject.

"When I gave you my niece, duke, I gave you a very precious possession. I need not expatiate upon her virtues and graces: they must be apparent to all who know her. She had little fortune, but she had a pure fresh young heart, and that freely and entirely she gave to you. I trust, from the bottom of my soul, you do not mean to break it."

"My dear Carlton," returns the duke, warmly, "I beg of you not to do me so much injustice; pray form no hasty impressions. I love my wife: I think" (and involuntarily his eyes travel round the luxurious apartment) "I have spared no pains to prove my affection and regard for her. Has she complained to you of any unkindness, any want of attention on my part?"

Bernard Carlton follows and answers the duke's thought.

"If wealth and luxury gave happiness, my niece ought to be the happiest woman in the world. But, duke, to a heart

that craves love, you may give all besides and yet leave it poor indeed. Let Viva feel that she possesses your undivided affection, and she will value it before all the gifts that your wealth and generosity can shower upon her."

"Viva, for some reason that I am ignorant of," answers the duke, "has conceived an absurd jealousy of me. You must concede that in society a jealous wife is an intolerable burden, and that a woman who chooses to adopt that rôle is more likely to shock and displease than to win her husband."

"My niece is English," replies Mr. Carlton, coldly, "and Englishwomen are apt to look for fidelity in their husbands."

"Fidelity!" repeats the duke, with vivacity. "Is it possible that Viva accuses me of failing in that? Pray, my dear Carlton, disabuse your mind at once of such an absurdity. Madame de Marsal (for I cannot pretend to be ignorant of your meaning) is an old and dear friend of mine. Her society and conversation are charming; it would be as painful to me as unnecessary to give up her friendship; and it was my wife's unwise display of jealousy at Compiègne that has compelled me to keep from her my occasional meetings with Madame de Marsal. I admit that the contre-temps of this evening was embarrassing and gave apparent cause for displeasure to Viva; but, enfin! she brought it upon herself!" And the duke, pleased with the line of argument he has chosen, gives a little shrug, as though the affair were disposed of.

Mr. Carlton is silent for a moment: he feels there is a great deal in what the duke says.

"You have much influence with Viva," proceeds her husband, presently: "will you not talk to her and tell her how injurious these foolish jealousies will be to both of us? The Duchesse de Lallière should have more dignity than to behave like a school-girl in the sulks."

Mr. Carlton looks at him fixedly.

"Believe me, duke," he says, "it is a rash thing to throw away lightly a love such as Viva has given you. You may fritter away your life in a dozen ephemeral passions, but the day will come when you will regret the heart that would have been so true if you had not by your own act alienated it."

"And believe me, dear Carlton," answers the duke, lightly, "you are taking matters too much *au sérieux*. I adore my wife; she is charming; and between us we must convince her

that she has taken an absurd idea into her head and that for both our sakes she must banish it."

"What do you say to coming over to The Towers to shoot my pheasants?" suggests Mr. Carlton: "the coverts have not been touched yet, and I can promise you some very good sport. Once there, I think we could make Viva forget her suspicions, and it will be for you not to let them revive again."

"We will see," answers the duke, cheerfully. "If the idea pleases Viva, and I can manage it, we will be your guests. I go shooting again to-morrow, and shall start early. When I return, I hope you will have persuaded the duchess to greet me with smiles instead of reproaches. Good-night! sleep well!" And the two men exchange hand-shakes which they endeavor to make cordial.

But the duke is in no pleasant mood as, having dismissed his servant, he flings himself into a chair by the fire. Oh, how he regrets having forged the chains for himself that threaten to gall him so bitterly! Pauline de Marsal has resumed her old sway over him, nay, a greater sway, since danger and difficulty are the fuel with which Love feeds his fires. But Victor de Lallière is a gentleman; he is deeply conscious that having married a woman who is fair and true and loving, he has no right to make her wretched, to break her heart. A thousand times he curses the folly that prompted him to meet Madame de Marsal at the theatre: in the eyes of a man of the world, an indiscretion on his own part is almost more unpardonable than a crime. The duke has yet another cause for dissatisfaction. Whilst he was with Madame de Marsal, De M——, one of the handsomest, most fashionable young fellows of the day, had come in, and the *empressement* with which she received him had gone a long way towards avenging Viva. And, apart from his reluctance to leave Paris and the woman whose society is his chief pleasure, there is a feeling of uneasy, mortified vanity at having, as it were, to confess and atone for a fault. Bernard Carlton has been a great favorite of his, but in his new position of taskmaster the duke feels a decided diminution of regard for him. Still, there are redeeming circumstances. The duke is a keen sportsman; the hunting and shooting in Southshire are excellent; it is absolutely necessary, if there is to be any peace or pleasure in his domestic relations for the future, that his wife's suspicions

shall be lulled. So he decides to spend a few weeks at The Towers,—to send over some of his hunters and the ponies Viva drives; and with a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders, he rouses himself from his meditations and goes to bed.

Viva comes down to breakfast in the morning, pale and heavy-eyed. She has not slept much, and has cried a great deal. Bernard Carlton, too, has given most of the small hours to reflection, and has arrived at a conclusion as to the best way of treating his niece's malady.

"My dear," he says, cheerfully, "I am quite angry with you, and with myself too. We have been making mountains out of molehills. I had a long talk with the duke last night, and am thoroughly satisfied that your wrongs are only in your own imagination. And, Viva, I am going to speak to you very seriously, for, my dear little girl, I am afraid you are very much in danger of throwing away your own happiness unless you conquer this disposition to jealousy."

"Have I not cause?" says Viva, reproachfully.

"No; I am not at all prepared to say you have. You are half a Frenchwoman; you are perfectly aware that French society is constituted upon different principles from society in England: there is *very much* more freedom allowed both to husbands and to wives."

"I know it, but it is bad and wrong!" answers the duchess, with vivacity. "Do you think I could ever care more for any other man's society than my husband's? do you think I would devote myself to any one if I knew it gave pain to him?"

"I do not think you would. But you are young and full of imagination; you do not seem to reflect that a man may take great pleasure in the conversation and companionship of a clever woman without being at all in love with her. You are very charming, my dear, but you must not be so vain" (smiling) "as to imagine that you can represent the whole sex to the duke." The tears are welling up in Viva's deep-colored eyes: they look like two Veronicas drowned in dew. Her uncle's words are bitter to her, but they are acting as a tonic on her mind. She is silent, and he proceeds:

"You have the gifts that are the most esteemed in your sex,—youth and freshness. You cannot have everything. As some compensation for the loss of youth (one they rarely regard

as at all adequate), older women gain experience, knowledge of life, the art of pleasing and interesting by their conversation, by their *savoir-faire.* It is natural that men, particularly men no longer very young themselves, should take pleasure in the society of women of this sort, among whom I suppose Madame de Marsal takes rank, and it would be indeed hard if they were forbidden the pleasures of agreeable and intelligent intercourse."

"It is not so that Victor feels for Madame de Marsal," says Viva, the tears chasing each other down her fair cheeks.

"But the duke assures me that it is. Nay, more, he tells me that he has been driven to seeing her without your knowledge by your unreasonable jealousy. And, my dear Viva, believe me, there is no torment, no scourge, so bitter as jealousy if you give way to it, nothing so false, so treacherous, so blind, nothing that can make the person who is influenced by it so wretched, or that can so embitter the lives of those they love and those who would love them but for it. Indeed, I must blame you, much as I love you. The duke is the kindest, most generous husband in the world; he denies you nothing; you have unbounded liberty, and yet you would curb his least words and actions; you would try to separate him from old and valued friends, you would frown and sulk with him for claiming a little of the liberty he so freely gives to you. Take warning," adds Bernard Carlton, warming to a false enthusiasm, for he knows full well that he is only trying to turn the tables on the duchess for the sake of reassuring her: "a man who has been his own master for so many years is not to be thwarted and controlled, and, by trying to exercise an authority over him to which you have no right, you are far more likely to alienate him than to compel him to your wishes. And now let me tell you how magnanimously your husband has behaved. I proposed to him that he should bring you over to The Towers for a few weeks' hunting and shooting, and he has promised to come if he can manage it, solely, I am sure, because he thinks it will be a pleasure to you. Does that look as if he entertained the feelings you suspect him of towards Madame de Marsal?"

The duchess is fairly sobbing by this time.

"Take my advice," continues Mr. Carlton, approaching and pressing her hand with an affectionate gesture: "when the

duke returns, meet him with pleasant smiles; do not allude to the past, it will be wiser not, but show him that you desire to atone for having misjudged him,—that you wish him to forget, as you forget, anything unpleasant between you; and make up your mind in future to exercise that discretion and self-control which your position demands of you. You surely would not wish to draw down ridicule upon yourself by your jealous airs! there is nothing the world detects so soon or has so little sympathy with as jealousy. Now," he adds, rising, "having fulfilled the unthankful task of giving you good advice, I will go and smoke a cigar: after that, if you are in the humor, I should like to see if your cobs go as well as ever. Au revoir, my dear." And Bernard Carlton goes out, sighing to himself to think how knowledge of the world may be made use of to deceive innocent and confiding hearts. And the duchess, left to herself, ponders over his words, and tells herself that she is a very wicked and foolish woman, and that she has been doing her best to throw away her happiness. But still, at the bottom of her heart, there lurks one poisonous drop, distilled from the noxious plant Doubt.

However, in the evening, when the duke returns, she receives him with smiles and with a tender little diffidence that seems to say, "I have been wrong: pardon me!" and the duke, who has really a kind heart, feels touched and remorseful and bestows a thousand charming little attentions upon Viva, which, we may be sure, are received with open arms. That evening they are present at a ball given at one of the foreign embassies, and the duchess is so radiant and admired that her husband's vanity is flattered. Madame de Marsal is there too, but he only salutes her and passes by. The countess's eyes flash, and she presses her lips a little closer together: it is not that she cares for the duke, but the least neglect from one of her slaves sets her pride on fire. Captain Clive is also among the guests. He makes his way at once towards the duchess, who welcomes him with a cordial smile.

"Do you know," she says, gayly, as later in the evening she leans on his arm after a dance, "we are going to stay at The Towers next week. I cannot tell you how I look forward to seeing the dear old home after a year's absence."

"I am delighted," responds Captain Clive. "I too am going on a visit to my brother. We shall be near neighbors."

A minute before, he had been ignorant of any such intention.

"That will be charming," says the duchess, adding, archly, "and I intend to hunt."

"I hope so," answers Alsager, devoutly, "and that you will let me take care of you."

"How magnanimous you are!" laughs Viva.

A week later, Mr. Carlton's carriage is rolling up the drive to The Towers.

"Oh, how I wish it were not too dark to see the dear old place?" cries the duchess, putting her head out of the window. "I am so happy, Victor! How good it was of you to come!"

The duke presses her hand kindly. Another moment, and the carriage stops; the great oaken door is flung open, and Mr. Carlton stands on the threshold of the grand old hall to welcome his guests. After she has embraced him, the duchess gives a gracious recognition to the servants, and caresses the dogs, who jump upon her with a rough and hearty welcome. She is as gay and pleased as a school-girl. Everything seems delightful to her: the dear, well-known objects scattered about, give her a thousand times more pleasure than her own magnificent possessions. The logs are crackling, blazing, roaring up the wide chimney with its splendid carved frame; the bright silver service and hissing urn stand on a table near, with hot cakes such as Weston has reminded her master "Miss Viva,—I beg her Grace's pardon,—the duchess, used to be so fond of."

"I shall spoil my dinner," says Viva, laughing, as she takes a second piece; "but it can't be helped. I never get anything like it in France."

"You are wiser, duke," remarks Mr. Carlton, smiling, as he helps him to sherry and bitters. "I think afternoon tea an invention of the enemy."

"Or the doctors," answers the duke. "It is a fine thing for dyspepsia."

"Nonsense, Victor! I have never had indigestion in my life."

"At your age, my dear, one never has, or ought not to have," he replies, gayly.

"To-night," interposes their host, "we are to have quite a

quiet evening. I thought you would prefer it after your journey. To-morrow there is a meet three miles from this. Your horses are safe and sound, duke, and will be quite ready to go if you are disposed. And in the evening I have asked the Ryvendales and Captain Clive, who is staying with them, to dine."

"Ah! Clive is a capital fellow," says the duke: "we met him at Compiègne, and I shall be charmed to renew my acquaintance with him."

"I could not ask any one else to-morrow," remarks Mr. Carlton, turning to Viva. "You know, since the loss of her son, poor Lady Ryvendale has had no heart to go anywhere, but she said she should like to see you, and I induced her to come, promising there should be no one else."

"Poor thing!" says Viva, her face clouding, "how terrible for her! I remember how devoted she was to her boy; but he always looked delicate."

"I fear there is more trouble in store for her. Poor Ryvendale looks as if he would not be here long."

"How is it they are not wintering abroad?" asks the duchess.

"He detests it so: he says he would rather die at home; and now that the boy is dead, for whose sake they used principally to travel, he has set his face resolutely against it."

"Captain Clive succeeds to the title, I suppose?" remarks the duke. "Is he also delicate? He does not look so."

"Not in the least. He is a very good fellow, and a keen sportsman. I hope to see a good deal of him. The day after to-morrow we begin shooting the coverts, duke, and a host of people are coming to dine in the evening. You will be inundated by invitations to shoot and dine: every one is most anxious for the honor of entertaining you."

The duke smiles: he is very fond of being made much of.

The next day, on their way to the meet, they come up with Captain Clive bound for the same goal. A cordial greeting is exchanged: the duke alludes gayly to the dilemma from which Alsager had rescued his wife.

"It has ceased to be a sore subject now," laughs Mr. Carlton, "but time was when the least allusion to it was enough to bring tears to my niece's eyes. I dare say" (turning to Captain Clive) "she did not confess to you that she had been

strictly enjoined not to follow the hounds on that particular day, as I was unable to go with her, and moreover I had suggested she should not even ride in the direction of the meet, for fear she should be tempted."

"Now, dear uncle, you don't tell the story quite fairly," laughs the duchess. "I did not ride to the meet, but we heard the hounds as we were passing the bottom of the wood, and suddenly they came streaming in our direction, and you know how Kitty pulls: I could not hold her a bit. Poor Mason! how he shouted and cried after me! I confess I did feel a wicked delight in Kitty's misbehavior; but what would have become of me if it had not been for Captain Clive, my mind fails to conjecture."

"I wonder if the duchess will allow me to give her a lead to-day in memory of my small service," says Alsager, with unusual diffidence; but Mr. Carlton, not giving him credit for more than a desire to show courtesy to his fair neighbor, replies,—

"No! To-day she must be my charge."

Captain Clive accepts the inevitable with a good grace, but he is not a little disappointed. When they arrive at the meet, the duke and duchess receive quite an ovation: Viva has always been a favorite, and the duke, on his visit to The Towers before his marriage, had gained no little popularity. The women were charmed with his manners; the men had a considerable respect for a Frenchman who rode so straight, shot so well, and knew so much about horses. Captain Clive, far too well-bred to attempt to monopolize the duchess under the circumstances, left her side, nor did he have another chance of speaking to her until he entered the drawing-room at The Towers with his brother and sister-in-law.

Lady Ryvendale was a fair, pale woman, with a face that must have been pretty once, and that not so long ago, but was marred now by its unutterable sadness. If she forced a smile, it was so wan, it moved those who beheld it almost more than tears: there is no sadder sight, I think, than the pale grievous smile with which some poor martyrs strive to hide a broken heart. Lady Ryvendale lived as it were between two sorrows, the memory of her lost boy and the knowledge that the day was not far distant when she would be bereft of husband as well as child. It was wonderful

how, with her aching heart, she could smile at all; but smile she did, for the doctors had cautioned her against betraying grief in Lord Ryvendale's presence. And so she had taught herself that pale stereotype of mirth, which, after all, could not have deceived a child. Viva was shocked, when she entered the room, to see the change in her: she went forward and kissed her tenderly, prompted by her sympathetic heart, and yet half afraid to remind the poor mother of her grief afresh. The tears stood in her own eyes, and Lady Ryvendale nearly broke down. During the evening the duchess could not fail to note and be touched by Captain Clive's manner to his sister-in-law. When he spoke to her, it was in the low, tender key that one involuntarily uses to a little child, or to some suffering creature whose pain we would fain alleviate yet know not how. He appealed to her frequently and drew her into the conversation, or if, as sometimes happened, her emotion would nearly master her, he skilfully diverted attention from her. Viva, who had conceived a great liking for him before, liked him tenfold more after she had seen him with Lady Ryvendale. When she wished him good-by that night, there was a softness in her eyes, a warmth in her response to his salutation, that sent a thrill through the young man's heart. He did not guess the motive that influenced her.

Lord Ryvendale was in excellent spirits. Viva, prompted again by her kind heart, exerted all her powers to please and amuse him, feeling, as people are wont to do, that great pity for one whom one knows Death has doomed. Why, I wonder? Is it that Life is so fair, so full of hope, of joy, of promise, that we feel it a sad thing for one of us to be cut off before he reaches the dreary old age that is the goal?

Lord Ryvendale laughed and talked in a bright and cheery manner, and sometimes the poor wife's eyes would rest on him with a glance in which there mingled wonder with a sort of sad content. He was passionately fond of music, and after dinner Viva went to the piano and played and sang to him.

"My wife has quite given up singing," he remarks, with a shade of discontent. "She used to sing, but I can never induce her even to touch the piano now."

"I have lost my voice," says poor Lady Ryvendale, with a wistful glance at him.

"It is because you never use it," he replies, a little impatiently.

Poor woman! She has no heart for gay songs,—her voice would refuse its office,—and the little plaintive ditties she was wont to sing to her boy, who loved music as much as his father, would have broken her heart.

The duchess had a charming voice,—so young, so fresh and sweet,—not the dexterous voice that surprises the listener with trills, roulades, shakes, but the voice that goes straight to his heart. Lady Ryvendale went away to a corner, pretending to look at an album; her husband threw himself into a chair at a little distance from the piano.

Captain Clive, the duke, and Mr. Carlton, were talking in the cosy little anteroom separated from the drawing-room by a portière of old tapestry. Their voices did not interrupt the singing, and the singing did not interfere with their conversation. Captain Clive saw that it was hopeless to dream of having any talk with the duchess, and gave up the idea. I trust no reader will conceive a prejudice against him when I reveal that he had no ear for music and cared nothing at all about it. I believe there are several most agreeable and excellent men in whom the sense of music is entirely wanting.

But during her visit to The Towers there were many days and hours in which he could see and talk to Viva; and the fascination which she had exercised over him at Compiègne grew ever greater. Her uncle's shrewd eyes were not long in reading the state of Alsager's heart. He was perplexed. He hardly knew what to think. He began to watch Viva keenly when Captain Clive was present, and his fears soon melted into thin air.

"She likes him," Mr. Carlton told himself: "she takes pleasure in his society; that is all" (emphatically). "I do not know if she is aware of his feelings,—probably she is: women are very shrewd in that way,—but one thing I know, thank God! he is wasting his time. Not that I think ill of him. I do not for an instant believe he has any intention that is not strictly honorable towards Viva, but his passion is getting too strong for him. If he were wise, he would put himself out of the way of temptation. The only thing I fear is the duke's playing into his hands, not knowingly, not inten-

tionally, but if he persist in his attentions to Madame de Mersal, pique might drive Viva, as it has driven many a woman before her, to accept the devotion of another man."

It was the last day of the duchess's stay in Southshire. She was riding home after a long run, and Captain Clive, as usual, was beside her. Mr. Carlton and the duke were some little distance behind.

"Duchess," says Alsager, suddenly, the color deepening in his face, and his heart beginning to beat quicker, "I want to say something to you that will, I dare say, sound foolish and quite uncalled-for. Every one loves you,—how can they help it?—you seem to have everything the world can give; but—but—if it were possible that you ever wanted, I won't say a friend, that is not likely, but some one on whom you could rely, some one who could do you some service that you would not care to ask of every one,—will you," (hesitating) "will you think of me? will you remember that it would make me intensely happy to be of some little use to you, and that you may trust me as you would—a brother?"

The duchess is a little embarrassed. Some women would have laughed at such a request, would perhaps have turned it into ridicule: such a proposition certainly seems a little out of place, nor does she see how it could be possible for Captain Clive to serve her; but her own extreme sensitiveness makes her ever careful of the feelings of those about her, and she answers, with just a shade of hesitation,—

"You are very kind. I will remember what you have said."

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### A COSTLY KISS.

It was an afternoon late in spring. A fancy fair was being held in the orangery at the Tuileries, under the special patronage of the Empress. Princesses, duchesses, marchionesses, held stalls, and most of them seemed thoroughly to enjoy condescending from their high estate and turning themselves for

the time into shop-women. It must be confessed that, had any woman in the latter class of life been so importunate, so grasping, so pushing, so *effrontée*, her customers would have been few and far between; but such was not the case here: as a rule, those ladies prospered best who had most successfully dropped all sense of delicacy and diffidence. Charity evidently gives a license for brazen manners and unblushing pertinacity, or why do we so often have the spectacle of well-born, gently-nurtured women assuming at these bazaars for charitable objects a demeanor and a forwardness that they would indignantly resent in the class whom they are pretending to ape? The great ladies at the Tuileries, for the most part, showed a rapacity and an eagerness which, for any other object but the charity that covers a multitude of sins, might have been thought a serious breach of good taste and manners.

It was a pretty sight, nevertheless. The walls of the handsome gallery were draped with crimson velvet and gold; behind the double row of counters covered with nick-nacks, handsome, elegantly-dressed women were smiling and chattering; there was a profusion of lovely flowers. The sun, shining on the crimson, threw a rosy light over the scene; a delicious perfume came from the masses of roses arranged in pyramids; there was a sound of many voices and much laughter: every one seemed to be spending a delightful afternoon, even the poor victims who had been most cruelly pillaged. The young men of fashion, who wished to stand well with the aristocratic beauties, appeared to have inexhaustible purses; men of lesser rank, who only knew the fair dames by sight or reputation, were even more eager to purchase a word or a smile at a fabulous price, and these, we may be sure, were made to pay handsomely for the privilege. Ladies of high rank were running about among the crowd, forcing flowers, cigars, lights on every man, young or old, and demanding outrageous prices for their wares. Three very pretty women kept the buffet, and, with all the allurements of pert barmaids, served out liqueurs, beer, sandwiches, cakes, cigars, or carried the beverages ordered, to little iron tables placed about to imitate a real café They wore large white aprons, into which they dropped the money they received, and invariably asked, in a way not to be refused, for something for themselves.

The Duchess de Lallière kept a stall of bouquets and flowers.

She might have been the goddess Flora herself, with her fresh, charming face looking out from the nest of flowers arranged with exquisite taste about her. Unlike most of the ladies, she wore a high dress, her pretext being a slight cold. It was of white muslin, trimmed lavishly with fine Valenciennes. Round her throat was a double row of large pearls, with a magnificent diamond pendant,—the only ornament she wore.

The duchess was far from emulating her fair friends in their "pillage for charity:" those who purchased at her stall were perfectly safe from being either pigeoned or importuned. A little card bearing the words "*Prix fixe*" hung from a chain of flowers. A jardinière was five francs: there were bouquets at ten, twenty, and forty francs. As the young duchess was very popular and much admired, her stall was besieged, and, had her principle of not extorting money by unfair means been a little trick of diplomacy instead of the instinct of a delicate and refined mind, it could hardly have been more successful. Her admirers, not satisfied with buying the most expensive bouquets her stall contained, laid down, in payment, notes for a hundred, five hundred, some a thousand francs, saying "For the poor," and it would have been absurd for the duchess to decline these graceful offerings. The duke came in, paid her a compliment, begged of her to favor him by fastening a flower in his coat, laid down his thousand-franc note, and passed on.

Captain Clive had been at the duchess's side most of the afternoon. They had seen a great deal of each other since their meeting at Compiègne. The duchess told herself that it was because he was English that his society was so pleasant to her; Captain Clive did not attempt to give himself any reason for the delight he felt in her presence.

It was six o'clock. The duchess had sold nearly every flower from her stall. Alsager was leaning on the counter, talking to her, when the Vicomte de ——, his particular aversion, approached. This gentleman affected a very devoted admiration for the duchess, which was far from pleasing to her and was eminently irritating to Captain Clive: he was, besides, a professed lady-killer, and fancied himself irresistible.

"Ah, duchess," he murmured, tenderly, "I am in despair: it was impossible for me to get here before, and now I fear I come too late. Have you not a single flower?" The duchess

looked round, and saw that there was one jardinière left in the nest of moss.

"Duchess," said Alsager, eagerly, "do not forget that you promised to keep one for me."

"Come, monsieur, since it is the last and you have been so long in securing it, let us bid for it," uttered the Vicomte de ——, in a supercilious tone. "Five hundred francs, duchess."

"A thousand," said Alsager, coolly.

"Oh, no!" cried the duchess. "I do not permit gambling.'

"For the poor, duchess," returned the vicomte: "you cannot refuse for them."

"Two thousand francs."

"Three," said Alsager, a look of truly British determination coming into his face.

"Four," smiled the vicomte.

"Five," said Alsager.

"Six," murmured the vicomte.

The duchess was thoroughly vexed. She knew Captain Clive was not a rich man like the vicomte; she hardly saw how it was to end, and she would not have Alsager humiliated for the world.

"It is impossible," she says, with energy, "absurd! I will not permit it."

"For the poor, duchess: you cannot sacrifice them," murmurs the vicomte, languidly.

"Seven thousand," said Alsager, doggedly.

"Eight thousand," uttered the vicomte.

A sudden inspiration came to the duchess.

"It is yours, vicomte," she cried, almost before the words were out of his lips, handing him the flower.

He seized and pressed it to his heart with a look of ineffable delight and triumph. Captain Clive flushed crimson with anger and surprise. But in a moment the duchess had taken from her dress the white rose-bud she wore, and, handing it to him with her sweetest smile, said,—

"I *give* you that. I owe you something for your kind help this afternoon."

You may imagine if Alsager adored her at that moment.

The vicomte preserved his calmness admirably. He took out his check-book, wrote a check for eight thousand francs,

handed it to the duchess, made her a profound bow, and departed,—her enemy from that moment. A vain man never forgives a woman who has made him look small.

The duchess already half regrets her impulse: she knows perfectly well that it was prompted by a good-natured desire to save Captain Clive from an embarrassment, but will he, will the world, regard it in that light? will not her unconsidered action look like a very pointed mark of favor? In the crowded gallery, this scene has not been enacted without witnesses.

Alsager had placed the flower triumphantly in his buttonhole. The duchess gave a wistful glance at it; she was half inclined to ask for it back again; in her heart she almost felt as though he ought to offer to return it. But he had no such thought: his only desire was to tell her how proud and glad he felt; but she, dimly guessing at his wish, said, quickly,—

"My occupation is gone. I should like to walk about and see the other stalls."

And as she spoke, she came round and joined him.

Captain Clive felt instinctively that she did not wish him to refer to the flower, and obeyed her unspoken desire. They were soon chatting gayly about other matters, a good deal amused at the scene around them. A pretty woman, Madame de Fontaneilles, a great friend of the duchess, kept a Wheel of Fortune, which she had to turn incessantly for the young men who thronged round her counter. Her pretty, piquante face was pink with the exertion: she declared her arms fain to break.

"You must not stop, countess," she was reminded, laughingly,—"not for one instant: it is for the poor, remember."

"Mon Dieu! the poor, the poor!" she echoes. "I wonder if they ever work so hard as this to make two francs." (Every turn costs two francs, and the value of the prizes is about twenty-five centimes.)

"Ah, ma chère!" she cries, catching sight of the duchess, "are you free already? Come and help me, for the sake of holy charity!"

And Viva laughingly complies.

"Now," says the little countess, arbitrarily, "now that a duchess turns for you, messieurs, it will be five francs instead of two."

"A la bonne heure, comtesse!" laughs a young exquisite, "I have still a thousand francs to divide by five."

"And I!" "And I!" is echoed on all sides, with much laughter.

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" cries the little countess: "how is it, when there are so many of you rich and generous young men, the poor ever begin to want?"

There is a laugh at this sally, and Madame de Fontaneilles continues to exchange much persiflage with the fashionable throng, whilst the fair duchess turns the wheel resolutely with her slim fingers. Presently she escapes, and, rejoining Captain Clive, makes the tour of the counters. She stops at most of them to greet her friends and inquire what success they have had. Most of the fair ones are radiant; they are making fortunes: each one is as anxious to have collected the largest sum, as though the reputation of her charms depended upon it. The heaviest purse represents, in her eyes, the apple adjudged by Paris.

Presently the duchess and Alsager arrive in front of the stall kept by Madame de Marsal. A slight crowd is collected, watching, with considerable interest, two men who are bidding against each other for various articles. It is easy to see by their manner that there is some deeper feeling between them than the mere good-humored rivalry the occasion demands; it is also evident that the lady, either for vanity's sake, or from a desire to benefit the poor, is doing her best to increase the antagonism by seeming to favor first one, then the other. It is with a bitter feeling at her heart that Viva recognizes in one of the rivals her husband; the other is the Count de M——, whose flirtation with Madame de Marsal is becoming almost as notorious as that from which the Duke de Lallière had thought it prudent to divert attention by marrying. The duke was getting very much in earnest; the familiarity of the count's manner towards Madame de Marsal irritated him exceedingly; there was a covert impertinence in it towards himself. His back was turned towards Viva; he had not seen her approach, but Madame de Marsal had, and her eyes flashed with renewed brilliancy; she affected the most exasperatingly coquettish manner.

Viva hated her, but some indefinable feeling kept her rooted to the spot.

Madame de Marsal had not forgotten how, upon more occasions than one, the duke had seemed to avoid her when his

young duchess was with him: here was a golden opportunity for revenge.

"I really have nothing more worth selling," she says, glancing round her stall, "but I am not yet satisfied with my day's earnings. What shall I sell next?" And she puts one of her very beautiful hands to her face in an attitude of reflection.

"The privilege of kissing your hand," says the young count, gallantly. "That would be worth more than all your stall has held to-day."

"Oh, count!" (with a little bashful smile) "what an idea! Still" (hesitating), "for the poor—I hardly know——Well, what will you give?"

"Five hundred francs."

"A thousand," says the duke, smiling. He feels sure of his triumph now: the count's purse cannot hold out against his.

"Two thousand," says the count.

"Three thousand," cries the duke.

"Four thousand."

"Five thousand."

"Six thousand."

"Seven thousand."

"Eight thousand."

"Nine thousand."

"Ten thousand."

There is a pause. The young count has turned very pale: he has all the vanity of a Frenchman; he hates to be defeated, especially in the eyes of so many bystanders. A crowd has collected; the scene is becoming exciting: the duchess is hemmed in; she could not get away even if she wished,—not, at least, without attracting considerable attention. As for Alsager, he is divided between sympathy for Viva and detestation of her rival, at whom he is casting furious glances, as though he would annihilate her with them. She looks him full in the face with a mocking smile.

"Come, count," says the duke, banteringly, "have you said your last word? Ten thousand francs is not much for the privilege you were so eager for just now. Ma foi! it was a capital idea on your part."

As the duke speaks, he half turns, and catches sight of his wife's face. It is very expressive. But in that momentary

glance he sees something else: he sees that the rose-bud has gone from her dress and is decorating Captain Clive.

The duke is perfectly aware that Alsager admires his wife; and he is not at all jealous,—indeed, he is rather pleased; and if Viva can think it proper to bestow upon another man so open a mark of regard, it surely gives him license for what he is doing at the present moment. So he throws her a gay smile, to which she accords no token of recognition.

"Eleven thousand," says the count, trying to steady his voice.

"Twelve thousand!" utters the duke, calmly.

"Thirteen thousand!"

"Fourteen thousand!"

"Fifteen thousand!"

"Sixteen thousand!"

"Seventeen thousand!"

"Bravo! bravo!" murmurs the crowd, quite moved to sympathy by the young count's heroism.

"Eighteen thousand!" continues the duke, imperturbably.

"Nineteen thousand!" stammers the count.

"Twenty thousand!" says the duke, in a tone the calmness of which implies that he is prepared to go on to a hundred thousand if necessary. Madame de Marsal's eyes glitter with triumph. Viva's heart almost stands still with anger. Alsager involuntarily takes her hand in his and presses it: she is not even conscious of his action. The count is very pale: he bows to the duke, and says, in a low voice,—

"My *purse* cannot compete with yours, duke."

"Do you yield so soon?" exclaims the duke, tauntingly. "Twenty thousand francs seems a mere bagatelle for the privilege that, if you remember, count, *you* craved."

The count bites his moustache furiously. The duke turns to take the hand that Madame de Marsal presents with more than the coyness of a school-girl. The duke, whose manner to a woman no man in Paris can surpass, takes the hand and kisses it with a reverential devotion that sends a little murmur of applause through the crowd.

"Really, duke, I am ashamed," murmurs the countess. "*Enfin! c'est pour les pauvres.* Ah!" (pretending to catch sight of Viva for the first time) "there is the duchess. Dear duchess, reassure me; tell me that you have only this moment

arrived,—that you have not been witness of the duke's mad extravagance."

The duchess controls herself admirably.

"Oh, yes!" she answers, in a cold, haughty voice: "I saw the whole transaction."

"Dear duchess, you confound me, you make me blush. It was that naughty Comte de M——'s suggestion, and before I had even time to think—But enfin!" (with a little shrug) "it was for the poor: all is permitted for the sake of charity."

"*Evidently!*" returns the duchess, with a look from her proud eyes that makes the other wince. "And some ladies are so charitable they will sacrifice everything for the poor,—*even appearances.*"

And, putting her hand on Alsager's arm, she sweeps by.

They walk on in silence for a few minutes, and then she turns to him with a sudden gesture, and involuntarily tightening her clasp on his arm, says,—

"How I hate that woman!"

"And I!" he answers, crushing two other very expressive words between his teeth.

All the pleasure is gone out of the day for Viva; she feels a wild desire to get away from the scene, whose gayety jars upon her; she is afraid of herself, afraid of Alsager. She reads all the sympathy written in his eyes,—eyes that, as I said once before, possess a singular power of expression; she feels the want of some one in whom she can confide; she is tempted to pour out her sorrow, her pain, her disappointment to him, and she knows that it would be imprudent, dangerous, even wrong. She is full well aware that no woman has a right to seek sympathy from any man for the wrongs her husband inflicts upon her,—that confidences between a man and a married woman are of all things to be avoided. There is no coquetry in her disposition; she bestows none of the covert encouragements on men that pretty women, even of unquestionable virtue, sometimes affect to give them, but receives their homage with a gay graciousness, that, whilst it does not repel them, still forbids all hope of inspiring in her any sentiment beyond a friendly regard.

As for Alsager, he treats her with a tender, delicate respect such as a man is wont to show the woman who, in his eyes, is the fairest, dearest, noblest of her sex. And it is the utter

absence of any ostentatious pretension to her favor that makes her so ready to accept his friendship and so desirous to seek consolation from it.

When at last she was at liberty to leave the Tuileries and Alsager put her into her carriage, she turned on him, as he bade her "good-by," one pathetic look that expressed all the desire for sympathy that was burdening her heart.

"May I come and see you to-morrow morning?" he whispered.

"Between eleven and twelve," she answered; and, as the carriage rolled away, she half regretted the assent given.

Meantime a rumor had been circulated about the two biddings in which the Duke and Duchess de Lallière had been concerned. It was reported that the duchess, having sold all her flowers, had offered the rose in her bosom to auction; that it was at last knocked down to Captain Clive for fifteen thousand francs, but that the duchess had presented it to him, refusing to take any money for it. Some one else was good-natured enough to say that it was a ruse got up between Captain Clive and the duchess to pillage the Vicomte de ——. The story was told to Madame de Marsal, who did not fail to repeat it, with improvements, to the duke. He was not particularly gratified by the recital, but felt that he had no right to find any fault with Viva, after the scene in which he had taken so prominent a part.

When he met the duchess in private, and she showed him very markedly by her manner the displeasure she felt, he said, in a tone which he had never used to her before,—

"I fail to imagine, madame, by what right you give yourself these injured airs. Before you presume to judge my actions, I would suggest that you should examine your own, and reflect a little upon the construction that others may put upon them. There are husbands who would have taken very great, and perhaps not unjust, exception to a wife giving so marked a token of her regard to a man, in public, as the flower from her breast."

Viva's eyes flashed through indignant tears.

"It was no token of regard," she exclaims. "My motive was one of pure kindness. When I tell you the circumstances, you will say I only did what was perfectly right."

"I hardly share your confidence," answers the duke, coldly.

"At all events, your regard for one man, if report says true, made you play off a very unfair trick on another. However, I ask no explanation; indeed, I do not in the least care to hear it: your actions are perfectly free, and I shall take care that you do not interfere with mine. If you cannot control your looks and temper better than you did to-day, I shall so arrange matters that we do not for the future appear in public together."

The duchess finds no rejoinder to make: her heart is bitter within her; she feels that the impulse on which she had acted in the goodness of her heart had been a mistaken one, and had placed her before the eyes of others in a position that was utterly odious to her. Whatever happened, she was determined that no breath of slander should rest upon her, even if it cost her the sacrifice of the only man in Paris whose society and friendship she cared for. Many a weary hour she tossed on her pillow that night, seeking counsel from her own heart, and feeling a dreary disappointment in the life that had once promised so fair.

The next morning she and the duke breakfasted together as usual. She had too much pride to let the servants suspect anything unpleasant between them: as long as they were in the room she spoke in her usual manner to her husband, but when she was left alone with him she did not unclose her lips. He read the paper, apparently with unflagging interest.

Breakfast was nearly over when a servant announced to the duchess that Captain Clive was in the salon. She rose, and at this moment her husband looked up at her. There was an indefinable sneer on his face that stung her to the quick. A crimson flush covered her neck and brow, adding tenfold to her embarrassment. When she left the room, she was quite resolved what to do.

As she entered the salon, Alsager came quickly forward to meet her. The hand she gave him was cold and trembling; she could scarcely keep back the tears that forced themselves into her eyes.

"Come with me," she says, scarcely waiting to receive his greeting, and she leads the way to her boudoir. She is thoroughly, painfully conscious that what she is doing is scarcely *convenable*, that she is exposing herself to more misconstruction, but she has something to say to Captain Clive, and that

something must be said without risk of interruption. It is not very easy to begin, and she waits a moment, resting one hand upon a table, and seemingly intent on some flowers lying there for her to arrange.

Alsager comes near her, and says, looking at her sorrowfully,—

"You are unhappy! I wish to God I could help you! Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Yes," she says, raising her eyes to his face.

"Only tell me," he exclaims, eagerly.

"I want you to go away from Paris," she says, in a low voice, averting her face; and then she continues, speaking rapidly, "I know such a request might make some men think strange things of me, might even make them fancy it was a kind of confession on my part that they were dangerous to my peace of mind. I am not afraid of you; you are English; you are my friend; do you not remember" (with a little pathetic air of appeal) "how in Southshire, last winter, you offered me your friendship? You meant it, did you not?"

"So help me God I did!" he answers, in a low, hoarse voice.

"Well, now I will tell you the truth. It seems I did a foolish action yesterday" (blushing) "in giving you that flower. It was talked about: it came to the duke's ears. And he" (hesitating), "he has made use of it as a pretext to tell me that he will do anything he pleases, that my indiscretion, as he calls it, gives him a license to do what he will, to—" (she is going to say "to neglect me, to outrage my feelings," but she stops suddenly short. She has no right, she knows, to say these things of her husband to another man.)

She pauses, unable to fill up the unfinished sentence. Alsager does not speak, and she continues presently:

"I do not choose to give him any pretext," and her voice breaks a little, "and therefore I am prepared to give up my pleasant, innocent friendship with you, that it may be impossible for him ever to hint by word or look again that my conduct can excuse his."

"You have not thought of me," utters Alsager, in a low, pained voice: "you have forgotten what you are condemning me to in taking away your friendship, which is the dearest thing I have in life."

"Oh, friend," she says, sweetly, putting one hand in his, and looking wistfully in his face through tears, "it is, after all, such a small sacrifice. You can be nothing in my life except a pleasant landmark, nor yet I in yours; but the duke is my husband: it is right that I should give up all that might widen the gulf" (weeping) "that has grown between us. Some day, if I am patient,—if by my example I convince him how faithful those whom God has joined together should be one to the other,—he may come back to me, and we may be happy again. If you regard me as I think you do, will you not be glad to help me back to happiness?"

He stands looking at her with a cold pain at his heart. Self rebels against this sacrifice.

"Why won't you let me help you by staying?" he pleads. "I would give up anything if it could really make you happy; but I do not see how my going would avail. Let me stay! trust me, confide in me, let me give you what consolation I can. Believe me, you are wrong to send away a faithful heart that beats only to serve you. Are you afraid of me?" (earnestly); "do you think me so mean, so base, as to be capable of taking advantage of your confidence, of your pain, to further selfish ends of my own? Oh, duchess, indeed you misjudge me."

"I do not," she says, lifting her fair face again to his "But still I say, 'If you are my friend, go.'"

"Then am I never to see you again?"

"Oh, no, no! it would pain me to think that. Perhaps we may meet next winter. But just now, because the duke has false ideas of us, because the world is ready to point at our friendship,—for my sake, go."

"You leave me no alternative," he answers, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

And with that he lays his lips reverently on her hand and goes.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ALL—SAVE LOVE ALONE.

When he was gone, the duchess began to arrange her flowers. Small pleasure had she in the task to-day: the bright colors looked blurred and misty through the tears that veiled her eyes and fell now and again into the hearts of the roses. She had been strong to bid her friend go, strong while she saw him suffer, but, now that he was gone, she felt the day void and empty. He had understood her: she had not been ashamed of his knowing her pain; he was the only person against whose being witness of her humiliation she did not rebel. And she had sent him away—why? Because she felt herself growing to trust him too much? Because she feared his becoming too dear to her? Oh, no! such thoughts never once crossed her brain: her heart was fully and entirely her husband's, or he would no longer have had the power to inflict such bitter pain upon her. True, she had lost the illusions of her early married life, she had torn from her heart with tears and grief the thought, the hope of being all in all to him, but she had not even yet realized that the duke was indifferent to her. A passionate young heart says to itself either "he loves me" or "he hates me:" it cannot realize a calm, negative feeling of which it is itself incapable.

She had sent her true friend away because on his friendship her husband had cruelly and unjustly tried to hang an excuse for his own behavior towards Madame de Marsal: he had dared to imply that the friendship existing between her and Captain Clive was of the same nature as his own and the countess's. All Viva's pride rose up in arms.

"No!" she said to herself; "if I am obliged to sacrifice every friend I have in the world, it shall never be in his power to justify himself out of my conduct."

On the same afternoon, in the course of her drive, she had occasion to pass through the street in which Madame de Mar-

sal lived. Fate so ordained it that the duke's coupé was at that instant issuing from the gates.

He was inside, and, as he caught sight of his own liveries, threw himself into a corner to avoid his wife's observation. The movement was not lost upon Viva: a mingled rage and pain took possession of her.

"Drive to the Rue de Varennes," she said to the servant, as soon as she could command her voice. She would go to her grandmother: some one must share with her the intolerable load of her suffering. Until this moment, she had been careful to avoid any hint to the Marquise de Feuil of her unhappiness, for fear of causing her pain; but now she would go to her, would unburden her heart, would tell her all. She forbade her servant to announce her,—there was no fear of her grandmother not being at home,—and ordered the carriage to return for her in an hour. Then she swiftly ascended the stone steps, and, with a trembling hand, rang the bell. It was answered by a gray-headed old servant who had lived all his life in the family. The duchess forced a smile in answer to his pleasant greeting, and asked after her grandmother's health.

The marquise was a little less suffering to-day,—she had eaten nearly a whole wing of chicken; and the old fellow continued to talk garrulously as he conducted her to Madame de Feuil's apartment. They passed through a room, half hall, half library, then through the dining-room, furnished with dark oak and stamped leather of the fashion of a century ago, then through another vestibule to the marquise's sitting-room. It was handsomely, even richly furnished, in the style of a bygone day: there was not a single modern article to contrast its newness with the sober, dignified surroundings. They were admirably in keeping with the tenant of the room,—an elderly lady with a sweet distinguished face.

Her silver hair was drawn from her face, under a cap of finest point, a similar kerchief was crossed on her breast, lace mittens encased her delicate, still beautiful hands.

The serene face lights up with a smile as the duchess enters.

"Good child!" she says, as Viva stoops to kiss her: "in your happiness you do not forget the sick and the aged."

Old Pierre has withdrawn, and Viva's answer is to throw herself sobbing into a chair.

Madame de Feuil is infinitely distressed.

"My child, my poor little one, what hast thou?" she murmurs, tenderly, stroking Viva's hand. "The duke? nothing ails him, I trust?"

"No," answers Viva, bitterly, "nothing ails him." He is well,—he is happy: it is I who am broken-hearted."

And then she pours into Madame de Feuil's ears the story of her woes and wrongs. She tells of the duke's meeting with Madame de Marsal at Compiègne; of her own appeal to him, and the manner in which he received it; how then for the first time the cruel knowledge dawned upon her that she did not possess his heart; she speaks of his presence at the theatre with the countess, and of various after-causes of uneasiness and jealousy, culminating in his public act of rivalry with the Comte de M—— yesterday, and his visit to Madame de Marsal to-day.

As the marquise listens to the recital, the sorrow deepens in her kind face, her lips quiver, the tears stand in her soft gray eyes. The years that have gone over her head have taught her the illusory nature of human hopes, the futility of human aspirations after happiness, but they have not lessened her sympathy for those who have yet, even at the outset of life, to find the bitter lesson thrust upon them. Youth is made, she thinks, to enjoy, to believe, to trust; hope has been educating all their young years, and she knows through what grievous pain and sorrow they are doomed to pass ere they can unlearn that bright teaching, and come to the knowledge that there is no real lasting happiness this side heaven.

"Oh," wails Viva, while her grandmother still holds her hands and searches in her tender heart for some words of comfort wherewith to minister to her stricken child, "if I had not loved him, if I had married him from ambition, I might perhaps have deserved this; but you know, grandmamma, that it was for himself,—that his title, his wealth, weighed nothing with me; I gave him all my heart; in marrying him, I dreamed of nothing but to find my happiness, to make his by a mutual love."

"What shall I say to you? how shall I comfort you, my beloved?" murmurs the marquise. "You know I was not glad at the thought of your marriage,—that I even ventured gently to oppose it. My reason was the dread of that coming to pass which to-day afflicts you. The morals of the court

are not pure: it is not, as you, my child, must have seen many a time, thought shame that men and women, bound by the marriage-tie, should act openly as though no such tie existed, —women as though it were no sin to receive the devotion of men other than their husbands, men to forget the vows they made at the altar to live solely for the woman they had chosen. The duke has occupied a leading position at the court ever since the Emperor's accession: he has been one of the foremost of the gay world: even though in most matters he is a man of irreproachable honor, want of fidelity in spirit to a wife (for I cannot think he would so deeply wrong you as to have carried his passion further) seems to him perhaps a venial sin, one that he would even resent your seeming to notice. That was the strongest ground for my objecting to him as a husband for you."

"Oh, grandmamma, why did you not warn me?"

"I had no right," replies the marquise, sadly; "and, my child, you would not have listened to me. A young girl who loves can doubt any one, every one, but the man her heart has chosen. Much as I know you regard me, you would have been ready to doubt my motives and intentions before his. And I could not tell. If it were possible for a man's heart to be kept by one woman, it seemed to me it must be by her who in my fond eyes combined all the graces that endear a woman to a man."

And the gentle old lady stoops lovingly to kiss the still weeping duchess.

"And yet," she adds, sighing bitterly, "you are not the first instance of a man throwing aside the devoted love of a pure woman for the fleeting favors of a heartless coquette. Some day, my child, his eyes will be opened: do you carry your cross in patience awaiting that day, and reposing your faith in God who alone can help you to bear this bitter pain. Ah, trust and pray!—pray always; and I too will pray for you every hour of the day, every waking hour of the night, and perhaps it may please the good God to let this bitter cup pass away from you, or to draw from it a blessing."

But poor Viva is not consoled by her grandmother's words. In the heyday of youth and health, with a passionate heart untrained by sorrow, by self-abnegation, with strong pride and a heart torn by a sense of injustice and cruelty, she cannot

meekly bow her head and bear her heavy cross with submissive tears. Her whole soul revolts and rebels; she *will not* acquiesce in her suffering; there is no justice in heaven or earth, it seems to her, if one, guiltless as she feels herself, is to be tortured thus. Religion can bring her no comfort, because her whole heart cries out against submission.

"I will not return to him," she cries, passionately. "Oh, grandmamma! let me come back and live with you where I was so happy!" And her voice breaks into a sob.

"My child," answers the marquise, gently, "because the duke fails in his duty to you, that does not absolve you from yours to him. If you take any hasty step, such as separating yourself from him, you force him forward on the path from which all your efforts must be concentrated to draw him back. With pride, with anger, you can do nothing: you must first ask counsel and grace to submit from heaven. Then, when you have conquered yourself, go to the duke yet once again; entreat him tenderly; show him all that is in your heart; let not one single word of anger or reproach cross your lips. No weapons but gentleness and forbearance can serve you in this matter."

The duchess shakes her head.

"I have already done that, and it availed nothing."

"My little one," answers the marquise, gently, "great victories are not won all at once; else would the battle of life not be the weary difficult thing it is. Courage, my child!—tell me at least that you will try." And the gentle old lady adds many tender and persuasive words, and the duchess, who still loves her husband and knows in her heart how bitter the pain of parting from him would be, acquiesces at last.

As she drives home, she repeats to herself the words she will say to the duke ere she sleeps that night. They are to dine out. As they drive together to the house of their host, she says a few gentle words to him, and he answers them courteously. But later, when they are alone, and, with a beating heart, she utters the timid words of her entreaty, the duke turns coldly from her, saying,—

"Understand me once for all, madame, I decline to discuss this matter with you. You will take your own course: rest assured that I shall pursue that which pleases me."

And, with this, he turns abruptly and leaves her.

She stands still by the table for a long time after he is gone, pressing her hand hard against her heart, as though that could still its pain. If one were to tell her now the most piteous tale of suffering and misery, it would not wring her heart, tender and compassionate though it be. She would not believe that any pain or want or woe could be so cruel as that which gnaws her own heart. Presently, with a long deep-drawn sigh, she wakes as it were from her trance, and sees, for the first time, a letter lying on the table directed to her. Mechanically she opens it and reads:

"I have obeyed your command. When this reaches you, I shall have left Paris. If it should ever be in the power of any one to help or serve you, will you not send for me?"

"Who *can* help me?" murmurs the duchess, with a bitter sigh.

* * * * * * *

Several months passed; winter had come again. Though, to the outside world, the Duke and Duchess de Lallière appeared to be on terms which called for no comment, a wall of ice had grown up between them. Viva had summoned all her pride to help her to bear the heart-ache: she had found it impossible to console herself for her sufferings by religion. If she gave way to any softer emotion,—if she dreamed, as she did yet sometimes, of winning back her husband by patience, by devotion,—the old agony would return, the passionate desire of loving and being loved. Hers was a generous, free-handed nature,—a nature that loved to heap its best gifts with unstinting hand on its beloved; but then there must be arms open to receive her gifts, to welcome them as gratefully as they were royally given. She was no patient Grizel. It was not in her to offer herself humbly and meekly, to endure coldness and neglect as though her love were worthy no better guerdon. So she entrenched herself behind an armor of pride, and nursed in her heart bitter and evil thoughts of her husband. To see good in him, to think kindly of him, would have been to go back to the old slavery and bondage of unrequited love. There are women who can give all without return, whose hearts grow richer by giving, who are fed by the very love they lavish; but they are not women like Viva,—perhaps better, nobler, certainly happier, but less human. It was a cruel pity to see this fair young creature, surrounded by all the world deems

worth having, leading a barren loveless life, unbrightened by a ray of hope that the future held a fairer promise for her. She was like Midas: all she touched was gold; there was nothing to nourish her starving heart. And yet her life might have been so bright, so happy. She loved pomp and luxury; no one more fully appreciated the *agréments* of life; she liked to be beautifully dressed, to have handsome horses, to be surrounded by the splendor and elegance that wealth and station such as the duke's command. There was only one thing wanting to make the world Paradise to her,—her husband's love. And, in the absence of that, all her grandeur, all her possessions, only served to accentuate her unhappiness, to make more forcible the contrast of what was with what might be. Love seemed to her the only thing worth having: the beggar maid whose lover was true to her was more enviable in her eyes than the wealthy admired Duchess de Lallière. Love was the refrain her heart uttered daily and nightly: the intense desire to be beloved occupied her to the exclusion of all else. There was no wrong in the thought; it took no human shape; it was never embodied in any of the men who surrounded her, flattered her, strove for her favor. Slowly and surely her resentment against the duke grew; she was teaching herself to read cruelty and treachery in his every act: oftentimes it was with difficulty that she controlled her tongue from uttering bitter, sneering words to him, her eyes from flashing out her anger and contempt for him.

The duke, on his part, had been suffering no less than his wife. He, the gay, light-hearted man of the world, with whom all went well, was transformed into a soured, bitter, discontented man. Without losing his outward polish of manner, he had become restless, irritable in himself, disinclined to settle to anything, and seemed to find his only consolation in constant change and excitement. He was frequently away from the duchess now, and she, who in the first months of their marriage had scarcely borne him out of her sight, acquiesced without comment in his frequent and protracted absences. They embittered her heart, nevertheless. Poor duchess! so young and fair—with such a loving heart! to feel it turning to gall and wormwood within her,—to know that her character was deteriorating day by day under the influence of these destructive passions,—to be filled with self

hatred and remorse, ever to seek and yet to find no remedy! Her health began to give way, her appetite to fail. A physician was called in. He prescribed constant change of air and scene. She went to Ems, to Biarritz. She plunged into a vortex of gayety. But slowly and surely the worm was gnawing at her heart.

To return to the duke. It was not long after the scene at the fancy bazaar that he discovered that Madame de Marsal had only been making use of him as a foil to the Comte de M——. She was no tender-hearted woman; the thought of giving pain to others did not distress her one whit; she had no scruple in making use of a man and casting him aside like an old glove when she no longer wanted him. The duke had served her vanity; all Paris knew that he had been willing and eager to turn from his fair young wife and to renew his allegiance to her. She cared nothing for him personally: what little regard she had to give was bestowed upon his good-looking young rival. The duke's jealous airs, his recriminations, his sufferings, bored her insufferably: the time was not long in coming when she was "not at home" to him. His sin was already finding him out. He was wretched. Once, in a violent fit of reaction, he was on the point of going to the duchess, of flinging himself at her feet, of entreating her to pardon him, to give him back the love he had so recklessly, so shamelessly abused. A false pride held him back. Had he but acted on that impulse, had he read aright that tender heart, he might have known what wells of love and forgiveness lay there, ready to gush forth at a touch. She would have taken his tired head on her faithful breast, have consoled him with her loving words, have forgiven him freely and fully from the very bottom of her heart. Women have a spécialité for forgiving. But shame forbade him, and the misery of both was sealed. She buoyed herself up with her pride, and he sought consolation from unworthy sources. There was another cause of estrangement between them. The duke had most ardently desired an heir: now that he had been married nearly two years and there was still no hope of his wish being fulfilled, he began to cherish a smothered resentment against the duchess. More than once he had made covert allusions to his disappointment in her presence. She too had clung to this hope, seeing in its realization a last chance of reconciliation

and reunion with the duke. Against this dispensation she rebelled bitterly, and her heart waxed daily more angry and stubborn. It seemed to her as it does to so many grieving sore-stricken souls: if one were only happy, it would be so easy to be good.

Madame de Feuil saw, with ever-growing pain, the change in her grandchild. Viva, who had been used to listen with such tender respect to her gentle teachings, grew impatient under them, began to give signs of weariness under advice, of anger and resistance when she spoke of the uses of adversity. She was no longer like the old Viva. But the gentle lady forbore to reproach her: she only increased her own prayers and intercessions for the child at the throne of grace.

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DIAMOND SNAKE.

One cold afternoon the duchess was driving up the Champs Elysées, daintily wrapped in furs. She could not bear to drive in a close carriage now: she had a perpetual craving for air, as people who suffer from repressed excitement and want of sleep always have. It was food and life to her.

Suddenly she uttered a little exclamation, and then called to the servant to stop. She had caught sight of an old friend, wending his way up the Champs Elysées on foot. The color flushed into her pale face, her eyes brightened, and when the carriage pulled up a yard ahead of him, Captain Clive failed to perceive for the moment how much she was altered.

"You in Paris!" she exclaims, in a glad voice. "Were you on your way to our house?"

The bronze in his face deepens a little. He looks at her meaningly as he answers, slowly,—

"No: I was only going to walk past it."

She has forgotten the terms on which they parted,—forgotten her injunction to him to keep away from her, forgotten that there had ever been any fear of the world coupling his

name with hers: she only feels as one does when one comes suddenly upon a dear and long-lost friend.

"Oh, but you must come!" she cries. "Come now: I am on my way home. And I have a thousand things to ask and hear. Have you been in Southshire? have you seen my uncle lately?"

"I was shooting with him the day before yesterday. I have been a month in Southshire, and now I am on my way to Cannes to join my poor brother."

"Is he so ill, then?"

"I fear so; and he is wretchedly dull and nervous. I am going to try to take a little of the nursing off my poor sister-in-law. But it is cold: I won't keep you here, and, as you are good enough to invite me, I will walk on to your house."

A few minutes later, Alsager is in the duchess's boudoir. Then, for the first time, he remarks the alteration in her.

"You are not well!" he says, anxiously. "You are paler, thinner than when I last saw you."

"No," she answers; "I have not been well for a long time. And I used to be so strong; nothing ever ailed me; I could always eat and sleep. I never dared to be sentimental or romantic with such an appetite, and from the moment I laid my head on my pillow until I was awakened, I used to sleep the sleep of the just. Now, nothing tempts me to eat, and I often hear the clock strike the small hours. And the time seems so long at night. Sometimes I am tempted to wish I were an opium-eater, that I might forget."

The duchess utters these words in a sad yearning tone.

"Forget!" Alsager echoes.

She recovers herself with a little blush. She has been betrayed for the moment into feeling as if she had known Captain Clive all her life and might speak her inmost thoughts to him.

"I mean forget the little worries and troubles of life," she says, hastily: "if one lies awake instead of sleeping, one is always apt to make too much of them."

"Have you not had advice? cannot the doctors do anything for you?"

"Oh, yes; they prescribe change of air and scene; I am always to be amused and happy,—not to allow anything to vex me. I dare say," adds the duchess, dryly, "that if I

could follow that prescription as easily as I can take their medicine, the result would be admirable."

For a long time the two sit talking. Viva has not felt so happy for an age: unconsciously she is consoled by knowing that her companion feels as deep an interest in her as ever. Presently the duke comes in. He greets Alsager with the greatest warmth, and proposes that he shall dine and go to the theatre with them.

"Ah!" he says, at dinner, when he remarks how much brighter Viva is than she has been of late, "it does my wife good to see a countryman; she languishes, I fear, for want of her English friends. You must come often and cheer her up."

It is an uncomfortable position to wish to dislike and to see nothing but bad in a man when circumstances and one's own common sense forbid one doing so. Alsager has received nothing but kindness and civility from the duke during their short acquaintance, he has never seen anything in his manner to the duchess that he could resent for her sake; he wants to hate him, but, on the contrary, he cannot help feeling drawn to him by the charm and courtesy of his manner. He feels an intense curiosity to know if Madame de Marsal still exercises her baleful influence over him. Seeing Viva's sad altered look, he can scarcely doubt it. The days go on. Captain Clive is still in Paris. Duty calls him to Cannes; every day he tells himself that he will go to-morrow. But "to-morrow never comes." The more he feels that he ought to go, the more he is tempted to stay. He *cannot* tear himself away. The duke invites him day after day,—it is evident he has no thought of jealousy,—and the duchess smiles brightly upon him when he comes. They are not often alone together: the Comtesse de Fontaneilles, Viva's greatest friend, is generally of the party. When they are, the duchess falls into a confidential tone, and speaks to him more intimately than to any one else. She has chosen him for her friend,—her friend of friends,—unheeding the danger that a woman incurs in taking a man for a confidant, most of all a man who is keenly alive to her fairness, her grace, her many charms, a man whose sympathy cannot, in the nature of things, be disinterested. Had she guessed how disastrous that friendship was doomed to be, how Fate was weaving by little threads the cord that

was to bind her future down to remorse and misery, how would she have fled from this easy pleasant intercourse that seemed given her as a special consolation for the past months of suffering!

Captain Clive had been nearly a fortnight in Paris. The duchess felt brighter and happier than she had done for many a long day: it was the lull before the storm. One morning he called to accompany her to an artist's studio to see a portrait of herself in course of painting: the duke seemed especially anxious for his opinion. Alsager was ushered, as usual, into the boudoir: it was there the duchess always received her intimate friends. In a few moments she came in, equipped for the drive, looking charming in her rich velvet and furs. They were to call on the way for Madame de Fontaneilles, whose hôtel was close by.

They have exchanged greetings, when a packet on her escritoire catches Viva's eye. She goes forward to take it. It looks like a jewel-case wrapped in white paper, and is sealed but not addressed. Naturally imagining that it is for her, she breaks the seals and begins to unfold the paper, talking to Alsager in the mean while. Presently she comes to the jewel-case, and, as she opens it, a little cry of admiration escapes her. It is a large and exquisite pendant, composed of great brilliants, most artistic in design and exceedingly valuable,—a snake curled round and round, the tail inwards, each coil widening until it reaches the head, which darts upwards and is formed of a large ruby of exquisite shape and color.

Viva feels a keen sense of pleasure, not at the acquisition of a new ornament, for her jewel-case is already full to overflowing, but at this sign of attention from the duke. At this moment she is disposed to pardon him a great deal for this little surprise intended to give her pleasure.

"Is it not lovely?" she cries to Alsager; "quite an art treasure. I will take it with me to —— and see if he cannot find a place for it in my picture."

A twinge of jealousy throbs in the young man's heart as he comes forward to look at the jewel. Stay! and he stoops to pick up a note that has fallen at the duchess's feet. She does not wait to look at the address on the cover, but tears it eagerly open and begins to read. Then her face blanches suddenly, she trembles, the note falls from her hands.

A smothered cry issues from her lips, and Alsager takes her by the arm and leads her gently to a seat.

In an instant he has divined the catastrophe, but he dares not speak, nor ask a question, only stands staring at her in mute pain for her pain. The ornament has fallen on the floor, and is sparkling and shining there in a ray of wintry sun, seeming to writhe like a living thing.

"Take it away! take it out of my sight!" cries the poor duchess, passionately; and Alsager picks it up and flings it on a side table. Then he comes back to her, and says, in a voice full of tenderness,—

"Tell me what distresses you."

"Read!" she says, pointing to the letter that is still lying on the floor. And Captain Clive reads as follows:

"Ma toute belle,—

"Deign to accept the trifle that accompanies this, unworthy as it is of one so divine and adorable as yourself. I hardly even yet realize my happiness in having inspired in you such sentiments as you profess. If you wish to give me a sincere pleasure, wear this in the third act to-night, without any other jewel than your own lovely eyes. I shall be in my usual place.

"Your all-devoted

"VICTOR DE LALLIÈRE."

Alsager turns to the envelope: it is addressed to a well-known actress at the —— Theatre.

He walks away to the window. What can he say to the duchess? All thought of any possible advantage to himself in the duke's infidelity is swallowed up in sorrow for her. He would give a year of his life to find something to say that would afford her real comfort. A low, wailing sob breaks on his ear, and he turns sharply, and, going to her chair, kneels down beside her, taking her hands tenderly in his and entreating her to be comforted. His heart bleeds for her; he could not feel a purer, truer sympathy were she his sister,—a more sincere desire to make the best of this disastrous business.

Suddenly she rouses herself.

"Do you think he had it put there?" she asks, in an agitated voice.

"No, no, no!" he answers, warmly. "There is no man

living who could be guilty of such a blackguard act as that."

"Then how came it there?"

An unexpected answer comes to her question. There is a low tap at the door. Alsager springs to his feet; the duchess tries to collect herself.

"*Entrez!*" she says; and Désirée appears on the threshold.

"*Pardon*, Madame la Duchesse, but Antoine is in the greatest trouble. He has lost a packet intrusted to him by M. le Duc, and he thinks to have dropped it from his pocket. He came in here for an instant to speak to Pierre, who was dusting about an hour ago."

"I will look," answers the duchess, hurriedly. "If I find it I will ring for you."

Désirée retires, not a little surprised and uneasy at her mistress's agitation. In one moment the duchess has resolved what she will do.

"I must know the truth," she says. "Quick, get the hateful thing; put in the letter with it; never mind the envelope." And she proceeds hastily to take a sheet of paper from her escritoire. Then, all in hot haste, with trembling fingers, the wraps up the jewel-case, lights a taper, and seals up the packet.

"Fortunately," she murmurs, "I have one of the duke's seals."

Alsager divines her thought.

"You do not wish it known that you have opened it," he hazards.

"No!" she answers, between her teeth.

"I wish Mademoiselle —— to have the duke's present. I wish, too, to have the pleasure of seeing her wear it."

Then she rings the bell, and Désirée reappears.

"Perhaps this is the packet," says the duchess, who has perfectly recovered her calmness.

"I think so, Madame la Duchesse. It is just such a one as Antoine describes."

Outside the door, Antoine receives the parcel with much apparent satisfaction and many compliments to Mademoiselle Désirée, who, however, treats them coldly. He is no favorite of hers. When he is out of her sight, Antoine smiles to himself: he sees that the wrapper has been changed.

"Aha, M. le Duc! you will not call me fool and scoundrel

and threaten to kick me for nothing next time! You no doubt have forgotten the little occurrence, and imagine me equally forgetful. Poor little duchess! I did not want to hurt her, but when one strikes one must strike home."

And Antoine goes cheerfully on his errand to Mademoiselle Beaux Yeux.

"What do you think of doing?" Alsager asks the duchess, seeing a determined fire in her eyes.

"I am going to the theatre to-night to see with my own eyes. The duke told me he should dine out: he was very solicitous about my not being dull" (bitterly), "and proposed half a dozen plans for my amusement."

"Do not go!" says Alsager, in a low voice of entreaty. "What good can it do you? Why should you make your pain greater?"

She puts her hand to her head.

"I feel as if I were dreaming," she says, looking up at him with a piteous air. "I cannot really believe it unless I see it with my own eyes. It might be a plot: that woman" (shuddering and thinking of Madame de Marsal) "might have some hand in it. Oh, it does not seem possible that the duke could wrong me so! Am I so repulsive that he must turn from me even to such a creature as that?"

Her voice holds such exceeding pathos that the man who listens feels himself unmanned. He knows not how to restrain himself from pouring out to her the torrent of words that are struggling for utterance. But he restrains himself: his voice is almost cold as he answers her:

"The duke must be mad. Men do have infatuations sometimes."

"I *must* see for myself," she murmurs. "And you—you will help me. I will go to the theatre to-night: you will take me?"

"Do not ask me," he utters in a low voice, a sudden fear of himself overcoming him. He is striving hard to fight against the wish that she may know her husband false.

"Do you remember," she cries passionately, "how in Southshire, how again in this very room, you prayed of me if ever I needed a friend to go to you? It was a mere façon de parler, perhaps? you did not mean me to put you to the test?"

"I did mean it," he answers, hoarsely: "*you know* I meant it."

"And yet" (bitterly) "the first time I ask anything of you, you refuse."

"I do not refuse."

"It is the same thing. I beg your pardon, I have been mistaken in you. I suppose all men are alike."

Alsager is stung to the quick.

"Tell me your wishes," he says. "Whatever they may be, I will obey them."

"You will go at once to the —— Theatre and take a box where I can see without being seen. You will await me at the door of the theatre at the beginning of the second act. If Louise de Fontaneilles is disengaged, she will accompany me (of course I shall tell her nothing); if not, I shall take my maid. Until then I shall not see you. You must make no excuse: if you do, I shall never trust you again."

Then Captain Clive accompanies her to the carriage, which has been waiting half an hour in the court-yard, and betakes himself about her errand with feelings of a very mingled nature. He is engaged to dine out: when he arrives at the theatre he finds every box taken: he drives to various offices, and by dint of an extravagant bribe secures one that will answer the duchess's purpose. Then he goes to make the best excuse he can for disappointing his intended host, and leaves him with the unpleasant consciousness of having given mortal offence.

The duchess, feverish, restless, devoured by tormenting reflections, is lying upon the sofa in her dressing-room. There is no light but the flicker of the wood fire. A tap comes at the door: the duke enters softly.

"Désirée told me you were suffering, dear angel," he says, in a kind tone, "and that you wished not to be disturbed; but I could not go out without assuring myself that your indisposition was but a slight one."

Viva feels as if she could laugh aloud at this mockery: she is forced to clasp her hands tightly together to prevent herself from breaking into a sudden passion of rage, or mirth, or what not.

"I am very suffering," she answers, turning her face more towards the pillow: "do not disturb me."

The duke stoops and prints a light kiss on her forehead. She sets her teeth with a sudden uncontrollable shudder.

"I regret having to leave you," murmurs her husband, "but I am forced to go, and our good Désirée is a better nurse than I." And he goes softly out.

When the door closes, the duchess springs up and pushes her hair from her forehead with a rapid gesture.

"Am I going mad?" she cries to herself, in an audible voice. "Oh, God! to think how I once loved this man!"

Two hours later, she is on her way the theatre, chatting gayly to Madame de Fontaneilles. That little lady, knowing nothing of the vulture gnawing at her friend's heart, suspects nothing, sees nothing, to excite suspicion in the increased brilliancy of her eyes, the unwonted carmine in her cheeks. Or if her shrewd little mind is visited by a suspicion, it is a thousand leagues from being the correct one. But Alsager, sitting in the back of the box, watches her with ill-concealed anxiety: he reads the false air of gayety with the eyes of one who has the key to the enigma, he hears the hollow ring in the voice that would fain seem joyous, he notes the little fingers plucking tremulously now and again at the gown under her cloak, he divines the movement of the impatient feet from the occasional stirring of the drapery that conceals them.

The piece is a *féerie*. Mademoiselle —— both sings and acts. At the close of the second act, a magnificent bouquet is thrown to her from a side box. The donor is concealed from view: only a black arm, a white glove, are visible. That the actress knows and is on excellent terms with the owner cannot be doubted from the special smiles she throws in his direction.

"Tiens!" cries the little countess, far from suspecting the dagger she is thrusting in her friend's side: "—— has evidently a new adorer. A married man, probably, since he is so afraid of letting himself be seen. Ah, these husbands! I have an immense curiosity to see who it is. And you, ma chère, —are you not dying to know too, or are you beyond that feminine weakness?"

"What does it matter," answers the duchess, forcing a mirthless laugh, "so long as it is not your husband or mine?"

It is the interval between the second and third act; Viva's hands and feet are icy cold, there is a hectic flush in her cheeks, her knees literally knock together with excitement,

with the dread of what she is going to see. Alsager feels utterly wretched: he would as lieve sit and see a poor helpless child or animal tortured as witness the suffering of this wrung heart: there is in her eyes, when she turns them upon him, a mute appeal that is unutterably pathetic. He rises to go out. She beckons him back.

"Go," she murmurs, whilst Madame de Fontaneilles appears engrossed with her lorgnettes,—"go and see if it is the duke, and come back and tell me."

He wishes she had asked him any other thing: it is hateful to his open English nature to play the spy; but he has devoted himself to her service: can he pick and choose what he will do for her, what refuse? Before he returns, the curtain is raised again, and —— is on the stage.

There is no more doubt, no more hoping against hope. The serpent that lay in the duchess's hand this morning is coiling and twisting on the actress's neck to night: it is so brilliant that most of the ladies' glasses are directed towards it.

"She has some diamonds, that woman!" ejaculates the countess; "probably a gift from Monsieur l'Inconnu. I saw her glance in a very meaning way at his box when the curtain drew up."

The duchess sinks back in her chair. A strange feeling creeps over her, as if she had suddenly become paralyzed: she no longer suffers; mechanically she hears the singing, music, laughter, applause, and all the time she feels as though it were some other woman whose heart has been wounded to the death, and that she is but a curious spectator. Alsager has returned. She does not question him, even by a look. He sees how it is with her, knows that there is but one thing he can do for her now, but one mercy he can show her,—to let her have perfect quiet. He draws his chair forward between her and the countess, so that she is screened from her friend's eyes, and devotes himself to being agreeable to that little lady, who, nothing loath, gives him every encouragement.

Viva feels as one in a dream. Gay colors float before her eyes without leaving any impression, she is conscious of sounds which she could not have remembered five minutes later; the scene is a mirage, a kaleidoscope: her heart is an empty, barren void. It is not until she is at home, alone, until Désirée has undressed and left her, that her soul awakes. The transition

from apathy to violent, intense anger and suffering is horrible: she holds her head with both hands, and smothers her cries of anguish and fury in the pillows. A horror seizes her that she is going mad, and the very fear makes her use superhuman efforts to become calm. A thousand wild projects assail her mind: at first she thinks she will go to the duke and upbraid him with his infamy; she will fly at daybreak from his roof forever,—will seek refuge from him with her uncle. She will appeal to the Empress; the whole Court shall know her wrongs. Thought after thought, plan after plan, chase each other through her disturbed brain. She is maddened by her degradation; she feels as if she could almost welcome Madame de Marsal as a rival now: she even wonders that she could ever have felt so bitter against her. To think that the man she calls husband, to whom she has given her freshness, her youth, her heart's best love, the man who but a few hours ago pressed his lips upon *her* face, should be the lover of a common actress, a woman whose shame is notorious! Is there any justice in heaven or earth, if such a thing as this can be?

"Pray!" murmurs a voice in her heart.

"Pray!" she echoes, with a passionate moan. "How can I pray when I am stricken to death for no fault of mine? Oh, it is unjust, cruel! I have *not* deserved it!"

---

## CHAPTER IX.

### FRIEND? OR BITTEREST FOE?

A SUDDEN terror, as I have said, came over the duchess lest she should lose her reason. If she was to do anything on the morrow, it was absolutely necessary that her nerves should be calmed. She had scarcely touched food for the last twenty-four hours: the agitation she had been in since the terrible discovery had made her unable to swallow a morsel. Suddenly she remembered a sleeping-draught her physician had sent her a month before, in case she should be unable at any time to procure natural sleep and felt an absolute want of it. She

looked on her dressing-table: yes, there stood the phial. She gazed longingly at it, wishing almost in her poor stricken heart that death were in it. Why should she care to wake again? what joy lay for her in the morrow, or any morrow that the future held? She poured the draught into a glass, and drank it to the last drop. Soon a drowsy feeling crept over her, an utter indifference to the events that she still recollected; then she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. When she awoke, Désirée, with an anxious face, was standing by her bed.

"Thank God, Madame is awake!" she cries, with an air of intense relief. "Madame was so white and still, I began to be frightened. I saw the empty bottle on the table, and a terror seized me that Madame was poisoned."

The duchess looks vaguely at her, scarcely taking in the sense of her words. She feels dull and heavy, utterly disinclined to rouse herself.

"Madame la Duchesse will take her chocolate," cries Désirée, briskly, bringing the silver tray to her side; but the duchess turns her head away wearily, saying, "Let me sleep, my good Désirée. I am so tired, so tired."

Désirée, uneasy and disappointed, sets down the tray and seats herself by the bedside. The time seems very long: she goes to fetch her work. When she returns, the duke is standing, watching his wife. He puts his finger to his lips, and Désirée creeps in softly. A pang of remorse seizes the husband: for the first time he remarks the change that has come over Viva: is this pale, grievous-faced woman the bright young girl whom less than two years ago he took to make part of his own life?

"And yet," he tells himself, "I have not been unkind to her: I have indulged her every caprice; I have surrounded her with luxury and gayety."

Oh, fool! to think that such things satisfy a loving woman's heart,—that they can stand in the place of the love and tenderness her hungered heart craves!

For a moment the thought crosses him that it would be well to give up the life he is leading,—there are more thorns than roses in it,—and devote himself to the duchess; but the aspiration is so feeble it dies away even before it has taken definite shape. Désirée points to the empty phial.

Ah! has it come to this? and the duke remembers with a pang how often he has watched that fair face asleep, faintly flushed and peaceful as a child's, with a smile half parting the rosy lips. They are pale now, those lips; no smile uncloses them; there are dark rings beneath the eyes; the cheeks are pale and waxen. This is what the great marriage has done for her that was to have crowned her young years with joy and triumph. Ah me! when fortune smiles her brightest smile, when she seems as though her full arms can scarce contain the shower of gifts she holds for the dowry of her favored ones, then, O poor mortal, if thou be one of these, tremble, for the fickle goddess has already in her mind the woes with which she will surely outbalance her favors.

"I am going into the country to look at some horses. Say to Madame la Duchesse that I shall return in time to accompany her to the dinner at the palace."

Then he goes softly out.

It is nearly midday before the duchess wakes from her drugged sleep. Her head is heavy: she has a dim consciousness of some misfortune having overtaken her, but as yet she is unable to remember anything. Désirée gives her the duke's message: then her consciousness returns. But a kind of apathy has crept over her; her passionate anger has subsided; she has to remind herself of her injuries, to say every minute to herself that she must resolve without delay on the course she means to take. Never, willingly, will she look upon the duke again; never again will she pass a night beneath his roof.

Where shall she go? Not to her grandmother: the marquise is ill with bronchitis, and her daughter-in-law is staying with her. The duchess does not like her aunt by marriage: she is austere, *dévote*, a woman who has no sympathy with the pains and pleasures of youth.

She must go to her uncle, starting by the night train without the duke's knowledge, for she knows that he could compel her to remain, were he so minded.

She resolves to telegraph to Mr. Carlton to meet her in London, and encloses the telegram to Captain Clive, asking him to forward it.

The telegram is worded thus: "Must leave this at once. Will not stay another day. Travel by night train. Pray meet me on arrival."

To Captain Clive she writes, "Please come to me this afternoon between three and four, and give me all necessary information about my journey."

Then she makes her toilet, choosing the simplest, darkest dress her wardrobe contains. She discards the costly rings she is in the habit of wearing, and puts on her finger only a diamond half hoop that had been her mother's. She even takes off her wedding ring, but replaces it, not wanting to arouse suspicion. Désirée watches her anxiously, but puts down anything that seems strange in her to the effects of the sleeping-draught, which she looks upon as an invention of the arch-enemy.

The duchess says nothing to her maid about her intended journey: there will be so little to pack, half an hour will suffice for all the arrangements. When she is dressed, she goes to her boudoir, giving orders that she is not to be disturbed, and that she will be at home to no one but Captain Clive. Viva sinks into a chair. Again that deadly lethargy steals over her, benumbing her pain, making her comparatively indifferent to everything. The hours pass on; she takes no heed of them. It is a dull, cold day: by three o'clock it is almost dusk. A few minutes after the clock has chimed, Captain Clive is announced.

The duchess rouses herself.

"You sent my despatch?" is her first question.

"Yes, and I think the answer arrived at the same moment as myself."

As he speaks, the servant enters with a telegram.

Viva opens it slowly. It does not occur to her that there can be answer to her message save one. When therefore she reads, "On no account start. Impossible for me either to meet or receive you at present. Wait for letter. Will be with you in a few days," she is stunned. She hands it in silence to Captain Clive.

"I suppose," he says, after reading it, "Mr. Carlton is in hopes that delay will give you time to change your mind."

"Change my mind!" she says, slowly, repeating his words. "And if I were to change my mind, would that alter the facts? Would the world know any the less that the Duke de Lallière preferred a common actress to his wife? Would my degradation be any the less because I seemed to consent to it?

Ah!" (with a bitter ring in her voice) "you are a man of the world: you think differently, perhaps: it seems a venial offence in your eyes that a man should be unfaithful to his wife: what is one woman's heart more or less?"

The color flushes to the young man's brow and throat; he trembles in every limb. Then, suddenly, he comes towards her. The words that have been pent up so long, words he has often thought to say to her, rush forth like a torrent: he is no longer the same man whom race and breeding have taught to be cold and impassive. He tells her all that is in his heart; he lays his life, his future, down before her; she has seen and known the powerlessness of outward circumstances to bring happiness; will she not come to a new life, where the worship, the devotion of a heart that lives but for her, shall be hers, hers only, until death?

The duchess listens as one in a dream. Her senses are still laden with the opium she has taken: she almost feels as though it would be easier to let the torrent sweep her along than to resist it. And still he pleads on, as though life or death hung on the granting of his prayer, and the old memory steals into her heart of how she has dreamed of, prayed for, a love like this. She *must* leave the duke; her uncle will not aid her in her need: what *should* she do?

When Captain Clive left the duchess, his brain was reeling; he could not realize that what seemed to him unutterable bliss was within his grasp. Oh, if Viva's good angel could have whispered in his ear, nay, could have shouted with a trumpet-sound so that he needs must listen, what cruel treachery his selfishness was heaping upon her whom he had asked to call him true friend! But he would have stopped his ears and hardened his heart.

People with small knowledge of the world, with little experience of its ways, unimaginative people, people who have lived all their lives within a narrrow groove as an insect crawls along a cart-rut, are given to regarding things that have not happened within their ken as improbable, unnatural. But those whose experience of nature has been wide and deep—those who have watched what great effects spring from trifling causes—know that, often, the actions which have the most serious consequences upon a whole life are utterly unpremeditated.

When Captain Clive left her, the duchess sat for a long time

immovable in her chair. She was not agitated, as one might imagine such a woman, placed in such a position, would be. An utter, lethargic indifference had taken possession of her: there was only one thought in the world that revolted her,—the thought of seeing the duke. She would be gone before he returned, she told herself, and she seemed to have no thought nor concern for the life to which she was going: her sole desire was to get away from the life she was living now.

She rang for Désirée.

"I am going out in an hour," she said to her, "and I want you to go with me."

"Madame la Duchesse will not fatigue herself," answers Désirée, with affectionate solicitude. "She has not forgotten that she dines at the palace to-night?"

The duchess does not answer for a moment, and Désirée is about to retire.

"Désirée!" she calls, in a low, soft voice; and the girl remains.

Another pause.

"I think thou lovest me," murmurs the duchess, in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "Thou shouldst. Remember, we are foster-sisters. The same breast nourished us both."

For answer, Désirée kisses the white hand outstretched to her. But the duchess draws her towards her and kisses her on the cheek.

"Canst thou obey me without asking a question?"

"The word of Madame la Duchesse is my law," answers the faithful girl, with tears in her eyes.

"We are going on a little journey,—thou and I, Désirée," says the duchess. "In an hour, have a few things packed, no ornaments, only bare necessaries, and *chut!*" (putting her finger to her lips) "not a word to any one! Light me a candle, and then go."

Désirée does as she is bidden, and goes out with a heavy heart. She still thinks the accursed draught has wrought some madness in her mistress's brain.

The duchess sits down to her escritoire, and writes:

"By accident, the present you designed for Mademoiselle —— fell into my hands yesterday. Unable to believe the horrible truth, I went last night to the theatre, and saw the

ornament upon her neck, saw the testimony of your admiration. I forbear to make any comment, to utter any reproach, beyond this: I gave you my heart, my life,—you have wrecked both. I leave you forever. My prayer is that we may never meet again."

Viva is surprised herself at the calmness with which she pens her farewell to the man whose love was all she once asked of heaven: there is no pain in the thought that she will never see him more, never be aught to him again in this world. For the rest, a dull apathy has taken possession of her: society, the world, what they will say, how they will judge her,—all these things are hidden behind a haze of unreality. No consciousness of guilt stings her, no terror of the future warns back her footsteps from the fatal path on which she is entering: she is insane,—insane as those who take their lives with their own hands,—insane as every woman is who from jealousy, revenge, passion, despair, from whatever cause, dooms herself to be an everlasting Pariah on the outskirts of society. No woman ever takes that step with a sane mind, any more than she stabs herself or swallows poison, let the world say what it will. Mechanically her eyes rested upon every graceful, luxurious object that had been wont to give her pleasure; she knew it was "for the last time," and yet these words, that somehow give pain even when the objects left behind have but little value for one, made no sad impression upon her. Clearly, she, so sympathetic, so keenly alive to the least impress of the senses, must still be under the influence of that baleful drug.

Half an hour later, the concierge was petrified to recognize the figures of the duchess and her maid going out quietly and on foot. Once in the street, Désirée called a close cab, and then, for the first time, Viva's heart began to give signs of returning life. A sudden fear came over her: she thought she would go at once to the Chemin de Fer du Nord, and fly to England without seeing Captain Clive again. Then she remembered with a feeling of despair that she had no money. The necessity for it had never crossed her mind: in the life she was accustomed to, having always horses and carriages at her command, unlimited credit in every shop she entered, she never even carried a purse, except on Sunday when she went to mass. She asked Désirée hesitatingly if she had any

money: the girl replied that she had brought twenty-five francs. It had been arranged that they were to take the night train for Marseilles, and that she should call for Captain Clive at his hotel on the way to the station.

Meantime, a very considerable embarrassment had befallen Alsager. He had gone at once to his agent, to provide himself with funds for the journey, but found the office closed. No answer came to his repeated summons, and he had to give up knocking in despair. He had only one friend in Paris to whom he could apply for a loan,—the English attaché. But, when he inquired for him, he found that he had left Paris for the evening an hour ago. Alsager was not a man addicted to jewelry: he had nothing with him of any value but his watch; and to part with that would be to make himself ridiculous at the outset. To start on a long journey with a woman accustomed, as the duchess was, to every possible refinement and luxury, without being amply provided with money, was simply out of the question: there was nothing for it but to delay the journey a day. He was mortified and embarrassed beyond description, but, like many a better man, had to resign himself to his fate. He engaged a suite of rooms at the hotel, and sat down to await the duchess's arrival. And, whilst he waited, the devil, who loses no opportunity to tempt the half fallen, put many thoughts into his head. He knew that Viva must and would infallibly repent of the step she had consented to: he thought it more than probable that she would not come, or that if she came it would be to bid him farewell and fly from him forever. And in his selfish passion he cried out in his heart that if he lost her now he should go mad. And, with that specious reasoning that comes so readily to those who love to be blind that they may push off remorse and repentance until it be too late, he whispered to himself how fair his love should make her life, how he would shield her from all the stings and arrows the world would be swift to launch at her.

His reflections were interrupted by the announcement that a lady was waiting in the court-yard to speak to him. With a beating heart he went to meet her.

"I find it impossible to start to-night," he says, in a low voice, "but I have taken rooms for you here under a fictitious name. You will not mind," he says, pleadingly, seeing

that she hesitates: "I have merely said that you are an English lady, travelling for your health to the south of France."

The duchess makes no further opposition, but, alighting, follows him up-stairs. He treats her with the most ceremonious courtesy.

"I have ordered dinner for you," he says, as he is about to leave her. "If you wish to see me at any time, I shall be in the hotel and at your commands."

The duchess merely bows her head. She is greatly relieved by this respite: she will have time now to change her plans, and she means to change them. Later, she will see him, will throw herself on his generosity: she feels sure he will not take advantage of a moment's frenzy on her part to bind her to a step that would cause her a life-long repentance.

This is the thought that vaguely shapes itself in her mind: the opiate still overpowers her brain and makes her incapable of thinking or acting with energy.

Meantime, the duke has returned from the country. All day he has been oppressed by the thought of Viva's pale, sad face: his conscience has pricked him, the desire to make amends for the wrong he has done her steals into his heart. He remembers her sweet loving ways to him in the first months of their marriage, her tender attachment to him, her naïve childish way of showing it. He cannot help contrasting her refinement with the coarse immodesty of his new innamorata, and he is disposed to find fault with Nature for having endowed him with a passion for change and excitement. He is not candid enough to confess to himself that he has fostered and indulged his passions: it is so much easier to find excuses in circumstances than to admit simply and humbly that we have sinned.

All day his heart is softening towards his wife, just as hers is hardening against him. He does not say to himself that he will give up Mademoiselle ——; he does not even see the necessity for that; but he will be more tender, more affectionate towards Viva,—he will show a greater solicitude for her happiness. On his arrival at home, he goes straight to her boudoir, his face prepared with smiles, kind words already framed upon his lips. She is not there; but his eyes fall on the solitary candle burning on the escritoire and lighting up a

letter lying on it. He approaches, and sees that it is addressed to himself. A sharp presentiment creeps to his heart; his hands literally tremble as he tears it open. When he grasps the sense, a cold sweat breaks out upon him. This is retribution with a vengeance! To him, nothing could be so terrible as an esclandre: that his domestic affairs should be offered to the world as a bonne bouche for its mirth, it derision, its love of scandal, is the most frightful punishment that can befall him. He throws himself into a chair, to think. Where is she? is there yet time to bring her back? he will take any step to accomplish that,—even violence, should it be necessary.

He rises and seeks her apartments. Everything is in perfect order, but she is not there. He looks, as a forlorn hope, into each room where it is possible she may be; then he goes to the concierge. Madame la Duchesse and her maid went out on foot three-quarters of an hour ago: Mademoiselle Désirée carried a black bag, the man tells him. The duke returns hurriedly to his room and writes to excuse his absence and the duchess's from the imperial party on the plea of sudden and severe indisposition on her part. Then he takes his hat, goes hurriedly out, and, jumping into a cab, bids the man drive to the Chemin de Fer du Nord. When he arrives, it wants a quarter of an hour to the time of the English mail starting. Anxiously he scans the faces of all the passengers to see if the duchess is among them. He waits until the train starts; but she is not there. Then he bethinks him that he will go to Captain Clive: it is possible she may have confided her intentions to him: never for one instant does a suspicion of the truth cross his brain. He returns to the cab, and bids the man drive to Alsager's hotel.

Captain Clive is dining in the coffee-room alone, when a card is brought to him with the intimation that the duke is waiting for him in his sitting-room. Alsager is no coward, but he turns white and sick at the announcement. He has fully realized the fact that he will have to face the duke at twelve paces, and that from that meeting he may never return alive, but between this and then he had pictured to himself a short season of utter bliss that would make him reckless of all which might come after. Did the duke know? and, as he held the card nervously in his hand, the thought flashed across

him that he might have come for his revenge. He went slowly to his bedroom, loaded a small pocket-pistol, which he thrust into his breast, and, with his heart beating, his brain whirling, he opened the door that connected the room with his sitting-room. One glance sufficed to show him that the duke knew nothing.

"I am in great trouble," M. de Lallière commences, abruptly, hardly waiting to exchange the customary greetings. "Can you guess the nature of it? can you tell me where my wife is?"

Captain Clive is ashen pale: he struggles to be calm: the thought flashes across him that if the duke were once aware of the duchess being in the hôtel, there would be an end to all his hopes.

"Have you seen her to-day?" asks the duke, hardly giving him time to answer the first question.

Captain Clive bows his head.

"You know, of course, the reason of my wife's flight. Can you tell me how she became aware of my gift to—to——"

"I was in the room at the time. I saw the duchess open the packet which was placed, unaddressed, upon her writing-table, as though to attract her eye."

The duke thinks of Antoine, and grinds his teeth.

Captain Clive continues in a hard voice,—he wants to smite the duke with remorse: it makes his own sin lighter to dwell upon the other's.

"She opened the case, and was delighted with the locket: she called upon me to admire it, and proposed to take it to ——, that he might add it to her portrait. I do not think it was the jewel that gratified her so much as the idea that you had thought to please her."

The duke bites his lip: remorse is busy at his heart.

"And then?" he says, in a low voice of inquiry. "I suppose she found the note?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"I think," answers Alsager, coldly, "that it will be easier for you to guess the shame and indignation she felt at suffering such a humiliation before a third person than for me to describe it to you."

"It is most unfortunate," murmurs the duke. "But it is done now: it is useless to waste time in unavailing regrets. My business now is to find her,—to prevail upon her to return home with me. Can you give me any clue to her whereabouts? I have been already to the night train for England, thinking her first impulse would lead her to fly to her uncle."

Alsager trembles with apprehension lest the duke should discover his wife's vicinity. The husband stands looking at him with eager inquiry: he has no time to reflect. Suddenly he says,—

"I think I can give you some information about the duchess. Excuse me for a moment."

He leaves the duke standing with a surprised expression upon his face, and, going into his bedroom, hastily pens the following lines:

"The duchess is on her way to Italy. She is under my protection. I am prepared to give you any satisfaction that you desire."

---

## CHAPTER X.

### "TO-MORROW, I WILL KILL YOU IF I CAN!"

CAPTAIN CLIVE takes his hat, goes down-stairs, and out of the hotel, first giving his note to a waiter to deliver to the duke.

There is no object in their meeting again now; they will do that soon enough. A presentiment steals across him that long ere this time to-morrow he will be lying stiff, stark, dead; but it does not frighten him; he feels no regret for what he has done. He only grinds his teeth with rage to think that, but for the silly contre-temps about the money, he and the duchess would be on their way to Italy now.

When Alsager's note is brought to the duke and he has read it, he is like a man turned to stone. Never had the faintest suspicion of his wife crossed his brain; he had believed her utterly, entirely devoted to himself: even on the day of the bazaar, when he twitted her with having given the

white rose to Captain Clive, he did not for a moment believe she cared for him more than as her countryman nor that any motive beyond good nature had actuated her. He had always seen through Alsager's feelings, and sometimes, when he wanted more freedom for himself, had half regretted that she so little reciprocated them. But, in a moment, an utter revulsion of feeling surges over him: there is no thought, no suspicion, too black or foul to brand her with. Whilst he has been pitying her and desiring to be better for her sake, it is he who has been the fool, the dupe, the victim. A furious hatred of them both takes possession of him: he thirsts for revenge; murder is in his heart; if there is any cunning left in his right hand, the foul destroyer of his honor shall never live to wreck another hearth. And she! he gloats over the thought of the punishment in store for her,—cast out from the world, shunned, despised, her pride humbled in the dust, and the man for whom she has sacrificed all, torn from her treacherous arms. If a painter could see the duke at this moment, and had genius to transfer the expression of his face to canvas, all Paris would have been running a few months later to gaze at the most perfect conception of Othello ever realized; but the duke's fury has no witness. He stops a moment to think.

If Alsager were to enter the room now, he would fling himself upon him like a wild beast and try to strangle him; but he rightly guesses that Captain Clive is not likely to risk a meeting at present.

He looks round for pen and ink, and sees them on a side-table. He opens the blotting-book. The first thing that meets his eye is an envelope addressed in his wife's hand to Captain Clive; it is the one that enclosed the telegram to her uncle. He clutches it furiously, spits upon it, tramples it under his feet, calling her by a foul name. Then he pauses; in his fury he would like to write insulting words to the man whom he believes to be the seducer of his wife,—wife! how he curses the law of France that admits no divorce!

Yet he could sin against her and feel himself aggrieved that she should even resent his infidelity; but when he (as he believed) was the victim of her falseness,—why, then no punishment was grievous or bitter enough for her. Society has made one law for men, another for women, and men enforce it upon the weaker sex to the utmost of their power. And it

is right and just that women should suffer for their sin; but is it right and just that they should suffer alone? To that view of justice for their sex, the clamorers for "women's rights" have never turned their attention. But then it is highly improbable that they have ever been tempted.

The duke restrains his passion, and merely writes these few words:

"*My seconds will be with you before midnight. To-morrow morning, I will kill you if I can.*"

Then he goes in search of his friends. When Captain Clive returns to the hôtel, half an hour later, he finds the duke's curt note. He has been turning over in his mind what men he can ask to act for him, and now determines to go at once in quest of them. Only that very morning he met an acquaintance who wanted him to dine and go to a certain theatre with him. It would be better to have a young fellow who would rather enjoy the excitement of the thing, than an older man who might want to mediate, or would even try, perhaps, to prevent the meeting. Alsager drove straight to the theatre, found Lord Fairholme, and in a few words communicated to him the service he required of him. There was another man with Lord Fairholme, about his own age, and Alsager told him to ask if he would be his other witness. "For," he said, "I prefer not to ask any one who knows me very well. They don't make much fuss about this sort of thing here, and I will arrange that your names shall not transpire."

So it was settled. All this had occupied time, and Captain Clive was not surprised to hear, on his return, that two gentlemen were awaiting him in his sitting-room. He also received at the same time a message that the English lady would be glad to speak with him, and sent Viva word that he would be with her as soon as possible. The interview with the duke's seconds did not last long: it was arranged that the duel should take place at eight in the morning with pistols.

When these gentlemen were gone, Alsager repaired at once to the duchess. She received him with a constrained manner; he was scarcely less embarrassed. She had something to say to him on a subject she hardly dared to broach; he had something to conceal from her, and yet he wanted her to know how much he had sacrificed for her,—how great his love had been;

he wanted to wring some word of tenderness from her before he took that farewell of her that he felt in his heart was to be forever.

He would have approached her, but she pointed to a seat by the fire opposite to her. She is trembling in every limb: it is some time before she can command her voice.

"When I consented to—to your proposal this afternoon," she says, at last, "I do not think I can have been in possession of my senses. I was smarting under a sense of injury; I was indignant with my uncle: I think, too, the opiate I took last night must have affected my brain. Never in my calm moments could I have entertained such a thought, not even for one instant. I know" (raising her clear eyes to his, and speaking with an accent of the liveliest emotion) "that my being here under the same roof with you and going by a false name is sufficient to compromise me most seriously; but Désirée is as true as steel; no one can know it except through you, and you will be generous, will you not? you will not try to make me stay; you will not try to bind me to my promise; you will let me go away by the early train to England alone! No one need be the wiser for my imprudence."

She sees him turn ashen pale. Involuntarily he puts his hand to his throat: his collar seems to choke him.

"Oh!" she pleads, her voice growing in intensity as though she were pleading for her life, "you would not condemn me to a life-long remorse. I am not like some women: it would break my heart." And she falls to bitter weeping.

Still his eyes are fixed on her with the same gray stony look, whilst an unutterable bitterness devours his heart. This is the woman whom he loves so madly that he is content to lay down his life for her, and she is crying, pleading to him against himself, bent only on showing him how poor and slight is her regard for him. He is not a man capable of self-abnegation,—not one of those heroic souls who can give all and seek nothing in return. And to die, shot down like a dog, for a woman who has never accorded him one of the least of love's favors, who wants nothing but to be quit of him, who will not for his sake incur willingly even a breath upon her fair fame,—that seems too hard a fate to bear without a protest. He had not meant her to know a word about the duel,—he had intended to take every precaution to prevent her suspecting it,—

but now, stung to the quick by her indifference, he no longer desires to spare her.

"To-morrow, I make no doubt, you will be free," he answers, in a cold voice. "I do not suppose that I shall ever trouble you again,—in this world."

She casts a terrified glance at him: an intuition of his meaning dawns upon her.

"Why do you say that? What do you mean?"

"The duke has been here."

Her face is blanched with terror.

"The duke!—And he knows——!"

"He does not know that you are here."

A low moan escapes her: she buries her face in her hands.

"But he suspects that I am with you! he has challenged you!"

"Yes," answers Alsager, in a low voice, not daring to look at her.

"And you dared to let him think——! Oh, my God! what shall I do?—what will become of me?" And she rises and walks to and fro with hurried steps, holding her head between her two hands. Then she flings herself on a sofa and falls to sobbing.

Alsager is distracted. He would give the world to recall his words, but it is too late.

"Oh, what have I done? what have I done?" she cries, almost beside herself with anguish and terror. "I am innocent; I have done no wrong; and yet I shall be branded as a murderess, and worse. And it is your doing!" she cries.

Alsager is stung to the quick.

"That is a woman's justice," he answers, bitterly. "I found you heart-broken, wretched, you felt yourself forsaken by all, and I,—I who have loved you passionately, devotedly, for a whole year, never daring to hope for any return,—I offered you my heart, my life. My sincerity is, I think, at least proved. Well, take both,—my heart, my life: let them convince you of my love! I will take care that the world shall not have it in its power to say you gave me any love or regard: it will believe the word of a man whom death stares in the face. Farewell, Madame la Duchesse!"

She springs up and seizes him by the arm.

"This meeting must not take place!" she cries, passionately.

"Do you hear me? must not! shall not! If it does, do you not see it destroys my name, my life, forever? If the duke fights with you, it is because he believes me—guilty."

What can Alsager say?

"If one could have foreseen," he mutters, "it might perhaps have been avoided. But I was taken unawares. I had not a moment to consider what I was to do. When the duke's card was brought to me, I imagined that he knew——"

"Knew what?"

"That you had left your home to join me," he stammers. "And—and, but for an unfortunate contre-temps, we should have been travelling towards Italy together now."

The duchess groans. It is too true. She is silent for a few moments, racking her brain to find some way out of this fearful pitfall.

"But now," she says, presently, raising her head, "now you must go to him, or I will go, if needs must, and tell him that it is all a mistake. Oh, I will fall at his feet, will humble myself before him, will even offer to return home, never to say a word of reproach to him for his crime against me. Oh, there is nothing I will not do to prevent this horror!"

"It is too late," answers Alsager, grimly. "And would he believe you when you had to confess that you had been here under the same roof with me for six hours?"

"He must believe me!" she answers, haughtily.

"Do not deceive yourself," says Alsager. "Nothing in the world can prevent our meeting now. The duke's seconds were with me when you sent for me: they are now engaged in making arrangements with mine."

The duchess looks at him like some poor wild thing caught in a trap: he is cut to the heart at very sight of her piteous face. How gladly would he now, if it were possible, undo the work of the past few hours! But it is not possible. All is over for him, but she may still be saved. And since it is so self-evident that she cares nothing for him, why expect any sacrifice from her? Oh! Fate has dealt hardly with him, he feels: one day, one week of this woman's love, to whom he is so madly devoted, and he would have given his life without a murmur; but now to die for nothing, absolutely for nothing, when it cannot benefit her, nor even save her good name.

He approaches her, and says, gently, in a voice that quivers though he tries hard to steady it,—

"Whatever happens, you will believe that I wanted to serve you. All may yet be well with you. Take the early train for England to-morrow, and go at once to your uncle, and trust me to do the best for you here."

There is only one thought in her heart,—to prevent the duel.

"If you will go with me, I will go!" she says.

"And be branded coward for my life? No! there is but one thing dearer to me than you, one duty more sacred than my duty to you,—my honor,—my name. If you promised me all that my heart craves most, I could not go until I have met the duke."

"And if you injure or murder him," cries the duchess, passionately, "do you imagine that would be a surer way to my regard?"

"Have no fear for the duke," he answers, coldly. "He is in no danger from me."

"And when are you to meet?" she asks, fixing her eyes upon him.

"At nine o'clock," he replies, thinking to himself that by then he will perhaps have been dead an hour.

"Good-by!" he says, trying to speak gayly. "Take my advice and leave here for England to-morrow. You must let me be your banker." And he draws out his note-case and lays it on the table. It contains fifteen pounds,—all the ready money he has for the moment.

"No, no!" she cries, pushing it away. "I will not leave Paris until it" (shuddering) "is over. If you are unhurt, I will go at once; if not——"

"What then?" he asks, eagerly.

"Then" (hesitating) "I will stay and nurse you."

"You will?" he cries, taking her hands with a sudden glad gesture. "Oh, no!" (in a disappointed tone, as she shrinks back) "you will not: you do not care enough for me for that. Good-night; good-by!" And he puts out his hand to her. A wistful look is in his eyes as they rest for the last time on the face he has loved so well. Surely, he thinks, if she has the tender womanly soul he has believed, she will have some warmer farewell to give the man who is about to lay down his life for her sake than a cold, commonplace greeting. His eyes

are dim; his hands tremble; he has never loved her as he does at this moment. But the duchess's glance is vague and wandering: her mind is full of what she means to do to prevent the duel: she is longing for him to be gone.

He turns and leaves her in bitterness of soul. There is nothing left in life worth having now: let death come! And then thousands of thoughts and memories come crowding to his brain. He has not been a good nor a religious man, but he can bring to mind no wrong-doing that seems very heinous in his eyes. He does not fear death: it does not seem to him that he would be any the better for having more time given him in which to feel the remorse that fear brings to the dying: he must take his chance with the great army of the dead who have gone to their graves without a moment's warning: if he were on the eve of a battle, his feelings would be the same. And then there crept into his heart the love of life that is so strong in those who in the zenith of youth and health are called upon to face death. To think that, after all, he should go before his brother,—his brother who for years has been dying by inches!

He sat down to write farewell letters to Lord Ryvendale and one or two friends whom he valued, and in each of them he stated exactly what his relations towards the duchess had been, and how, in one mad moment, he had been tempted to take advantage of her unhappiness to persuade her to trust herself to his protection. On the oath of a man who believed that when his words were read he would be gone on that far journey whence no traveller returns, he swore that the duchess had never given him a shadow of hope or encouragement, that he had never been more to her than a friend whose friendship was sanctioned and encouraged by her husband. He briefly told the story of the diamond ornament which had led to her discovery of the duke's infidelity. Then he wrote a letter to be given to the duke in the event of his death, and, last of all, one to the duchess.

He put all the letters in one envelope addressed to his servant, with a brief order to forward them in case of his death, and laid it in the blotting-book. Then he sent for the man, bade him not sit up for him nor call him the following morning until he rang, after which he dressed himself with care and left the hôtel.

It occurred to him that the duchess might have his movements watched in the morning, and perhaps follow him and attempt to stop the duel.

Meantime, Viva is taking sad counsel of her own heart and vainly trying to find a way out of her sore perplexity. At last she summons Désirée. The faithful girl comes in with a white, anxious face: she is grievously troubled at the events of the past few hours. She knows and loves her mistress too well to suspect any evil of her, but why is she here in Captain Clive's hôtel? why has she left her home suddenly and surreptitiously on the very night that she was to have dined at the Tuileries? Désirée's feminine mind reverts sadly to the exquisite *toilette* that Madame la Duchesse was to have worn. Désirée loves her mistress and foster-sister with her whole heart: she is content to follow her fortunes, whatever they may be: it is no self-seeking that causes the intense uneasiness she suffers.

"Come here, Désirée," says the duchess, as she enters. "Sit there," (pointing to a stool at her feet:) "I have something to say to you." And she pours into her faithful friend's ear the story of the packet, her visit to the theatre, her telegram to her uncle and his answer, her sudden resolve, the impending duel.

"Ah, traître!" mutters Désirée between her teeth, thinking of Antoine. "Ah, madame! something in him always revolted me. I felt he was false, deceitful, in spite of his smooth ways. It was no accident, but a malignant intention."

"How had I ever injured him?" murmurs the duchess, in a pathetic voice. "Why should he have wished to wring my heart?"

"It was more probably some spite against the duke," Désirée answers. "Ah! the monster!"

The duchess puts her hand to her head.

"Whatever happens, we must prevent this duel! I may count on your help, Désirée?"

"Need you ask, madame?" she cries, kissing her mistress's hand.

"No," answers the duchess, heartily. "Now go and dress whilst I write. You will not be afraid to go out at this hour to meet the duke?"

"I am afraid of nothing," replies Désirée, resolutely.

Viva sits down to write to her husband.

Oh, what a hard task for a woman, innocent and wronged as she is, to plead as though the guilt and shame were hers!

"Victor" (she writes), "I know not how to address you, feeling that, all innocent as I am, I stand as it were convicted of a horrible crime. Who should know me as you do? how can you for an instant believe me capable of a criminal passion for another? In one mad moment, driven by my wrongs (wrongs inflicted by you) to the verge of despair, impelled by the absolute necessity of leaving your roof, and with a sense of being deserted by those who should have been my support and refuge, I was tempted to accept Captain Clive's offer to accompany me to Italy. But before I had left our house an hour, I was awake to the madness of such a scheme: to-morrow I should have been on my way to England. Why need I be eager to exculpate myself from any imputation of guilt? you know me too well to suspect me in your heart: yet let me swear to you, if you need it, by my dead father and mother, by all my hopes of heaven, that never, by word, deed, or thought, have I wronged you or been unfaithful to you. It is you who have sinned against me, who have broken my heart, who have destroyed my life; and yet I would not reproach you now: I am even ready to forgive your cruelty, your wrongs. But this duel must not take place, *must not*, Victor: it would be a madness; it would be murder. You have no honor to avenge. Captain Clive has not wronged you; never has the smallest sign of love passed between us. Désirée has not left me since I came here. I have only seen Captain Clive for a few minutes, when he told me of your challenge. I shall never see him again. And it was but in a moment of compassion, seeing me overwhelmed by despair, and wanting to help me, that he offered me his protection. He will not attempt to fire at you; I know it: if you shoot him, it will be murder. Oh, Victor, for the love of mercy, for the love of God, for your own soul's sake, do not stain yourself with a crime which would brand all your after-life! I will submit to anything you prescribe, I who before God am utterly innocent. I will either leave you forever or return to your roof, whichever you may dictate; but forego, I beseech you, all thought of a revenge for which you have no cause. I ask nothing for myself,—it has pleased heaven to afflict me, all innocent as I am, with this awful judgment, and I must bear it,—but, oh, make not my

life an eternal remorse by the thought that a man's blood is on my head. Désirée takes you this letter: oh, I entreat you send her quickly back to me with an answer that shall relieve the torment of my mind. Question her: she will tell you how unfounded are your suspicions. Oh, for the love of God, do not let me remain in this horrible suspense!

"VIVA."

---

## CHAPTER XI.

### AT TWELVE PACES.

WHEN Désirée reaches the house, it is past midnight. But none of the servants have retired: the whole household is in a state of commotion and excitement. The duchess's disappearance, the duke's pale look of fury, his violent conduct towards Antoine, whom he literally kicked out of the house, —all these circumstances supply inexhaustible fuel for curiosity, surmise, conjecture. When Désirée makes her appearance, she is surrounded on all sides, assailed by a thousand questions, overwhelmed with attentions and politenesses. She answers coldly and quietly that Madame la Duchesse is at the house of a friend, that there is no reason for her absence which it concerns any one to know, and that her errand is to the duke.

Ah, but the duke is gone out, with a white furious face, and Auguste had seen through a crack in the door that he had been looking over the pistols in his room. Mademoiselle Désirée might be very clever (with sarcasm), but she would hardly persuade them that something very strange, very unusual, had not happened.

Désirée crept away, and waited in one of the rooms where she would hear if the duke came in. For two hours she kept her weary vigil, her heart beating at every sound, tormented by anxiety as she thought of the duchess, waiting in eager expectation for her return and suffering untold pangs of terror and suspense.

At last she heard the duke's footstep: the clock had just

struck three. He passed the door of the room where she stood, eager and breathless, with a slow, heavy step. She heard him go into his own room. With a white face and beating heart she followed him, and reached the door just as he was about to close it.

"M. le Duc!" she panted, feeling more terrified than she had ever done in her life. She could not have analyzed her sensations: the duke had always had a pleasant smile or a gay word for her; never in her life, until this moment, had she felt a shadow of awe of him. But now her heart beat, her pale lips almost refused their office: she felt as though he were a stern judge and she and her mistress condemned criminals.

"M. le Duc!" she stammered, and he looked at her with a face that wore a hard and cruel expression.

"Oh, it is you!" he said.

"I bring a letter from Madame la Duchesse." And, with trembling fingers, she stretches it towards him.

"Ah!" he utters, and there is a world of contempt in his voice as he pronounces that simple little word. He opens it with a slow, deliberate movement, and Désirée, faint and nervous, leans against the door for support. With a sinking heart she sees his brow grow darker as he reads, sees his lip curl with a cruel sarcastic smile.

When he has finished reading the letter, he replaces it quietly in the envelope.

"So!" he says, turning to Désirée with a smile that is more cruel than any frown: "your mistress, who wishes me to believe that she is a paragon of virtue and innocence, is at this moment under the same roof with her *friend!* How long have you been here?"

"I do not quite know, M. le Duc," she stammers. "I have had to wait for M. le Duc's return."

He laughs a sardonic laugh.

"I dare say you have not been wanted," he says, with a horrible meaning in his eyes.

"Oh, M. le Duc!" cries Désirée, "I entreat you, do not believe any harm of my mistress. She is as innocent as the angels."

The duke eyes her with a hard, cruel stare.

"And you are the innocent country-girl I have believed

you, eh? Bah! my good girl, the rôle you are trying to play is by no means an original one: you will soon, I have no doubt, find a more congenial one. I hope you have been paid well. Still, if you had thought to come to me, I might have made it better worth your while. I would have given a good sum to have been saved this degradation."

Désirée stands mutely staring at him: there is that in his voice and eyes which paralyzes all attempt on her part to answer him.

"Tell your mistress from me," he begins, and then checks himself. "No! wait! I will write my answer. Go into the little salon, and stop until I come."

She dares not disobey. It is in her heart to throw herself at his feet, with tears and prayers to plead for the duchess: but something in his manner freezes her senses and makes it impossible. She creeps away and waits. Her heart is full of misery: what pain is so cruel as to feel one's utter impotence to avert an awful calamity from one we dearly love?

The time wears on,—it seems an eternity to Désirée,—then she hears the duke's step on the threshold. He comes in, holding in his hand a letter.

Whilst she has been waiting, she has nerved herself to a great effort. When the duke enters, she throws herself at his feet.

"Oh, M. le Duc! hear me, I implore you! let me speak!"

A hard, strange laugh issues from his lips: it might have come from yon marble figure, so little human ring is there in it.

"You protest too much for innocence, my girl," he says, with sarcasm. "And the facts speak better for themselves. At this moment your mistress and her paramour are alone together." And he grinds his teeth. "Do not hasten back: be sure they are in no hurry for your return. Nay, *you shall not* return yet a while. I leave here at half-past seven to meet Captain Clive: you will remain here, in this room, until then: when I go out, I will let you out too. Make no noise,—do you hear me?—I shall be close at hand, and shall take care no one comes to your rescue."

And, throwing the letter down on the table, he goes out and locks the door behind him.

Désirée bursts into an agony of tears. She thinks how the duchess must at this moment be a prey to terror and impa-

tience, how minute by minute she must be expecting her return, distraught with anxiety: she knows full well, too, how compromising is her situation, left alone under the same roof with Captain Clive. She tries the door softly. Ah! if those little hands were as strong as her faithful heart, how the bolt would fly before them! She looks round for a knife or something to help her push back the lock. In vain! there is nothing but an ivory and silver paper-knife,—a mere toy. And then, since no human aid can reach her, she falls to prayer, and prays with the fervor that one might use who expected to see a miracle wrought in his behalf. But no answer comes to her tears and prayers: the cruel hours lag by and bring a gray icy dawn that makes her shiver and all the teeth in her head chatter. She feels faint and sick, for she has eaten nothing since her dinner the day before.

At last, after hours that have seemed long as days, she hears the key turn in the lock. She dares not meet the duke again, but waits until the sound of his steps has died away: then she hurries from the house that she knows she will nevermore enter, and through the cold, gray, half-lighted morning, back to her mistress.

The duchess is ghastly pale: her face wears the look of one who has kept some awful vigil: she is ten years older than that fair young duchess who rode with so blithe a face through the Compiègne woods.

"Oh, Désirée!" she moans, "why hast thou been so long?"

And Désirée, breathless and faint, gasps out her story. As she ends it, the clock on the chimney-piece strikes eight.

The duchess trembles violently. At this moment the two men are face to face; nay, the clock may be slow: one may already be dead! and her vivid imagination conjures up the scene. She sees Alsager lying on the ground, the blood oozing from his death-wound, his head supported by his seconds, and in a moment her heart paints a picture of the happy, useful, honored future that might have been his but for her sake. Cut off in his prime from all the joys and pleasures life might have held for him; gone to his death, unshriven, with perchance unrepented sins upon his head. And his blood lies at her door. Then she sees the duke, turning away horror-stricken from his ghastly morning's work, cursing her in his heart for having branded him a murderer.

Too late now to do aught but wait. To wait! powerless, helpless! oh, most cruel doom of all!

The minutes drag on. An hour goes by, and the poor duchess's heart is a picture-book in which a remorseless hand traces terrible pictures at which she is ever forced to gaze shuddering. Nine o'clock. There comes a sound of wheels in the court-yard; then low, smothered voices; then heavy steps, as of those who carry a burden.

"Do not go out!" entreats Désirée; but some hidden voice impels the duchess, and she stands on the staircase, watching with strained eyeballs and white lips the little procession that is ascending it. Oh, yes, he is dead! his face is ghastly pale, his linen is dyed with blood; he makes no movement, utters no groan. Two men carry him; a third holds his head,—it is her own physician. As she draws back into the door-way for the cortége to pass, she meets his eye. There is no sign of recognition between them: instinctively she feels that her reputation is gone, but in the presence of death that seems a small thing. Timidly, still impelled by the power that is stronger than she, she follows at a distance. She sees them carry him into a room, and then the door is closed. She dares not follow farther, but stands trembling, waiting until some one shall pass out from that dread chamber. Presently the door opens, and a fair young man comes out with hushed tread. He looks grave: his clothes too are stained with blood. The duchess makes a movement towards him and tries to speak; but no words issue through her parched lips. He looks pityingly at her, and is passing on, but she lays a trembling hand upon his arm.

"Is he dead?" she whispers.

"Oh, no," he answers, trying to speak cheerfully: "we hope he won't die. He is shot through the lung. He will have to be kept perfectly quiet. The only thing to fear is hemorrhage."

He is a good-hearted young fellow, and, looking at this agonized face that yet bears unmistakable traces of youth and beauty, he is smitten with a great pity. Though he believes her guilty, he, in his gay young heart, thinks love but a small crime, and only says to himself, sorrowfully, "Poor soul! how fond she is of him!"

A great load is taken off the duchess's mind; he is not

dead; he may not die. She goes back to her room, and bids Désirée watch for the doctor and beg him to come to her. Half an hour more of waiting, and he comes. Is this the courteous, almost obsequious physician who has always had a gay compliment for the charming duchess? Surely not: this is a cold, stiff-looking man with an expression of thinly-veiled contempt on his face. It is not, however, that he is by any means a censor of morals: he has many fashionable ladies among his patients whose liaisons are notorious, but then they have had no esclandre, and are living on good terms with their husbands.

"Is he in danger. Will he die?"

These are the duchess's first words.

"No: with care and *perfect quiet*, he has every chance of recovery. I must caution you, madame, against seeing him for the present: any excitement would bring on hemorrhage, and then——"

Dr. —— concludes with an expressive gesture. The duchess colors slightly. This man, who has been accustomed to treat her with the most flowery courtesy, calls her plain Madame, and his manner is such as he might use towards a bourgeoise.

"Pray listen to me a moment," she says, hurriedly, for he makes as though to go. "The circumstances under which you see me are, I know, most compromising to me, but I must entreat you not to judge by them. There is nothing, has been nothing, between Captain Clive and myself but the most ordinary friendship."

Dr. ——'s lips curve upwards with a smile expressive of the most perfect incredulity.

"You do not believe me!" cries the duchess, desperately. "Oh, I beseech you, listen whilst I tell you the whole story!"

"I beg your pardon, madame," he replies, coldly, taking out his watch: "I have not another moment to spare you."

And with that he takes his hat and goes, burning with impatience to be the first bearer of the news with which all Paris will be ringing ere nightfall.

All day long the heroine of this adventure, the woman whose name is on every lip, uttered in every varying inflection of which the human voice is capable,—surprise, contempt, derision, mirth, wonder, indignation, and once, here and there,

pity by some gentler soul,—all day long she is sitting like one in a trance, neither moving nor speaking.

"Will not Madame la Duchesse start for England?" entreats Désirée. "Will she not at least send for Monsieur Carlton?"

But the duchess only shakes her head. For, though she is as innocent as a child, though never has a guilty thought sullied her pure heart, she knows that her fair fame is smirched and blackened beyond all power of redemption; she can never hold up her head again now. Her uncle would probably refuse to receive her; and even if not, how could she return branded with shame to that home where she has always been held in such esteem and affection? No, she thinks, she must wait here until the wounded man is better, and then she will take refuge in some convent and be forgotten by the world. Heaven has smitten her with this grievous judgment for no fault or sin of hers: she can make no resistance, only lie crushed beneath it.

Late in the afternoon, she receives a message begging her to go to Captain Clive.

She obeys without hesitation.

He does not speak at first, but makes a movement of his hand as if asking her to take the seat beside him. She sits down, and, reading his wish in his eyes, puts her hand in his.

"You must not speak," she whispers, tenderly, for she is a true woman, and the sight of sickness or suffering goes straight to her kind heart. He closes his eyes, and she sits there by him a long time. But she is scarcely conscious of the strangeness of the situation: after the intense excitement she has undergone, a dull apathy has crept over her: nothing would seem strange or surprising to her now.

Presently Captain Clive uncloses his eyes. He is trying to speak, and she bends her ear closer to catch his words.

"You—will—not—leave me."

She hesitates.

He looks imploringly at her.

"I shall die—if you do—I do not want—to live."

"I will not leave you until you are better," she says, in a tremulous voice.

"Swear," he murmurs.

"I swear," she mutters.

The excitement is too much for him: the blood pours from

his mouth. The duchess, terrified, calls for help. His servant comes running: the doctor has left instructions what is to be done in case of such a contingency.

"Pray, pray go away, ma'am," entreats the man: "the doctor said he was not to see you. He will die if this comes on again."

So Viva goes, and sends Désirée, who soon becomes assistant nurse, and is of great help and comfort to Fletcher the valet.

It is another doctor who comes in the evening to see the patient,—a man whom the duchess does not know. She sends for him, and when he has reported to her about Captain Clive, he says, for he is a kind-hearted man,—

"And you, madame, you look as though you need my help almost as much. May I not prescribe for you?"

She raises her eyes imploringly to his face.

"Oh!" she says, with a great sigh, "give me something that will make me forget. That is all any one can do for me."

And he, seeing that her words are true, gives her a sleeping-draught, and night after night she sleeps heavily and loses consciousness of her intolerable misery, and day after day she wakes languid, weary, apathetic. She does nothing,—only looks at the clock and longs for night to come again. Often she thinks of her grandmother and yearns to have news of her. She would have gone to her ere now but for the fear of meeting the marquise, her aunt. One day she begs Désirée to go to the Rue de Varennes and make inquiries. When the girl returns, her face is very sorrowful; there are traces of tears on her cheeks.

"You have bad news," her mistress says, in a quiet voice. She is so inured to misfortune now, it has almost lost the power to sting her.

"Alas, yes, madame, sad indeed. The marquise is dead."

Dead! the kind heart still, the gentle eyes closed, the dear lips dumb without having blessed the grandchild whom she loved so fondly! Viva is stunned: she puts her hand to her brow and pushes back her hair with a gesture familiar to her when in pain or trouble "When did she die?" Viva's voice sounds hollow and unnatural, even to her own ears.

"The night before last," Désirée sobs.

"Did she know?"

There is a pause. The duchess repeats her question.

Désirée replies only by a movement of the head.

"And that killed her!" murmurs the duchess. "Oh, great God!" (wildly), "what have I done, that thou shouldst heap all these afflictions upon my innocent head?" Then turning to Désirée, "You saw Madame de Feuil. It was she who said so. Why need I ask? do I not know her cruel, uncharitable heart?"

Then she sinks back in her chair and relapses into utter silence.

More days go by. Désirée is in constant attendance upon Captain Clive: if she is absent for an hour, he asks for her, and Fletcher, who is fast losing his heart to her, is nothing loath to entreat her company when his master bids him do so. Captain Clive is gaining strength: soon the doctor promises that he shall see Viva. And to that he looks forward with an intensity not to be described. He will not believe that he can ever lose her again. He knows that she has held no communication with her uncle; he knows that her grandmother is dead: to whom, then, shall she go?

One day the duchess is sitting listlessly as usual before the fire. She is growing thin and wasted; her cheeks are pale and wan, in her eyes there is a haggard, wistful look. What is to become of her in the future? that is the thought which haunts her day and night now. When she thinks of a religious life, she shudders: it offers no hope of peace or consolation to her. She is oppressed by a sense of cruelty and wrong; she cannot bow her head to kiss the rod that has smitten her; her soul is full of rebellion and misery.

Viva takes a newspaper from the table and looks wearily over it. The time seems so long, and yet she has no energy to do anything. She has always been dependent on fresh air; now this enforced confinement is beginning to tell terribly upon her. A paragraph catches her eye:

"Mademoiselle ——, of the —— Theatre, is creating quite a sensation by the magnificence of her jewels. Rumor hints that these brilliant stones not long ago flashed on the fair person of a beauty of the highest world. Rumor further asserts that this fair lady is still watching with untiring devotion by the bedside of her wounded cavalier."

Viva puts down the paper. A fortnight ago she was the

proud, admired Duchesse de Lallière, those jewels were hers, everything the world deems worth having was hers, and to-day she is—what? Without money, without home, without friends, without love, save the love of this man,—a love that is more cruel than hate, since no hate could have worked such woe upon her. One rash step has led her to this, one step taken in a fit of anger and despair.

At last the day comes when she is permitted to see Captain Clive. He is pale and thin, but his expressive eyes are the larger, the more beautiful, for that. A faint flush comes into his face at sight of her: his agitation is so great, he fears to speak. He longs to be well now. Day after day she spends with him, and every morning she tells herself that to-day she will bid him farewell forever, and every night she reproaches herself with want of courage, and yet trembles at the thought of life alone, desolate, without him.

At last she nerves herself to say the words that are to part them forever.

But he! nay, *he will not* let her go. He pleads as a man only can plead when a woman's soul is at stake,—as though *his* soul should gain all that hers loses.

She stands trembling between two lives, a life (as *he* tells her) of intolerable loneliness and wasting despair, and a life that shall be rich with love and gladness, crowned by the devotion of a faithful heart. How eloquent his lips are of that future that seems so fair by contrast with the past agony! how his eyes confirm the vows his lips swear with such eager intensity! There are no clouds in the sunny skies the lover breathes of to his mistress; there are no shadows to the pictures he draws of the life that his love shall make perfect. Does she believe him? Do women who have lived in the world, who have seen the awful retribution that follows a step such as that to which Alsager would lure the duchess, believe that their case will be an exception to the common rule?

Nay, the most unhappy woman, the one most cruelly wronged by her husband, is bound by an immutable law to lead a fairer, happier life than she who trusts the vows of the most impassioned lover who ever swore to sacrifice this world and the next for love's sake.

If, haply, this book should fall into the hands of some woman who in her pain and bitterness of heart is tempted to

fly for refuge to an unhallowed love, let her read on and see how it fared with the Duchess de Lallière. Then let her pause and think over the fate of women who in her own time have embarked on that perilous venture and so made shipwreck of their lives. And let her be *quite sure* that no better, kinder fate awaits her if she yield to the temptation that now seems all but overwhelming, but from which she has yet time to escape.

---

## CHAPTER XII.

### TOO LATE.

BERNARD CARLTON sits alone in his study. Before him lies an open letter in the handwriting of the Duc de Lallière.

"Your niece" (it says) "left my roof yesterday and joined Captain Clive at the Hôtel ——. I come from punishing her seducer. Unfortunately, I aimed too high, and the bullet I intended for his heart penetrated the lung only. The law of my country and my religion prevent my ridding myself of the woman who has dishonored me. For my own part, I should prefer to keep this disgraceful affair out of the law courts. The sum you settled upon your niece will be paid to your banker for her use. If you wish to prefer any other claim upon me, favor me by doing so through the medium of D——. Various objects left in my house by your niece on her flight will be duly forwarded to you. To a man of honor like yourself, this blow will, I cannot doubt, be most severe. Believe me that although I cannot desire in the future any connection with the family of the person whom, most unhappily, I am still compelled to call Duchess de Lallière, you will always hold a high place in the esteem of

"VICTOR DE LALLIÈRE."

It is before this letter that Bernard Carlton sits paralyzed. Viva! his proud Viva, upon whose honor and purity, little as he believes in women, he would have staked everything he possesses in the world. Swiftly his memory recalls her visit

to The Towers just a year ago, and Captain Clive's evident devotion to her. He had seen no danger to her in it. Had he been deceived, or was it that later, piqued by the duke' indifference, jealous of his attentions to other women, she had turned to Alsager for sympathy, and that her heart had been gradually won by his devotion?

Mr. Carlton unlocked a drawer and took from it the telegram that he had received from the duchess two days previously. Over and over again he conned the words mechanically; "Must leave this at once. Will not stay another day Travel by night train. Pray meet me on arrival."

The more he read it, the more he thought of it, the more certain he became that the cause of Viva's leaving the duke was jealousy. And if he had obeyed her telegram, he might have saved her! The thought almost maddened him. He paced the room, his heart gnawed by an intolerable pain,—such pain as he had never thought it possible to feel again. For thirty years he had been learning to be a stoic, to be unmoved by grief or disappointment, to have no faith and so to spare himself the shock of finding himself deceived. And yet, without acknowledging it to himself, he had believed implicitly in Viva.

The reasons that had prompted him to send his telegram in answer to hers were these. First, he believed that she had acted in a fit of anger on the spur of the moment, and that with a little time given her for reflection she would cool down and be glad that she had avoided the esclandre that a flight from her husband's roof would have given rise to. Secondly, he had the house full of guests, and his departure and the duchess's sudden and unexpected arrival must necessarily have awakened suspicion and comment. Under the circumstances it would be eminently disagreeable to her to find herself in the midst of comparative strangers and obliged to play an unconsidered part before them. He had acted for the best, and had, alas! committed an error that no human power could retrieve now. She has taken the awful plunge. God have mercy upon her! not a lifetime of virtue, of repentance, can make the world condone that one rash act. How can he help her? Nay, he *cannot*. Shall he go and tear her from the arms of the man to whom she has flown for shelter and consolation? Of what use? In him lies her only hope for the future,—

the future that looms so black and threatening before her. *If* he is faithful to her through the years to come, her fate must be a bitter and cruel one; and if not (and Bernard Carlton knows the world and men's hearts too well to believe he will be), why, then again, God help her! What more is there to say? Ah, if he could but know the truth,—if he could see Viva innocent, helpless, needing most sorely his aid,—if he could be inspired to go to her, to hear her most miserable, incredible story from her own lips,—how might he save her the terrible future that is waiting now to engulf her,—the shame, the ruin, the remorse! "Oh, purblind race of miserable men!" what shoals and quicksands a grain of knowledge would sometimes keep your stumbling feet from!

The gong sounds for breakfast. Mr. Carlton rings his bell

"Ask Mr. Desmond to come to me," he says, and, a minute later, a good-looking, bright-faced youth throws open the door and comes forward with a hearty greeting. But he breaks off in the midst, seeing something unusual in his host's face.

"Nothing wrong, sir, I hope?" he asks, anxiously.

"I have had some bad news," Mr. Carlton answers, quietly; "but do not say anything about it. I want you to do the honors for me this morning. Say I have some important business to transact. You will take my place with the shooting-party and ask the ladies how they would like to amuse themselves. The landau and the pony-carriage are at their service."

Otho Desmond lingers.

"I am so awfully sorry you are in trouble," he says, his fair frank face clouding over. "I—I suppose I can't do anything to help you."

"Yes, my dear fellow," Mr. Carlton answers, reading all the sympathy in the other's face. "Take these people off my hands for a few hours, and you will be helping me immensely."

Otho goes, and again Mr. Carlton is left alone with his sad thoughts for company. He has a quick imagination: in a moment of time, all the probable consequences of Viva's fatal act detail themselves before him. In a few months at the farthest, Captain Clive will be Lord Ryvendale. The first violence of his passion will be spent then; it may have died out altogether,—who knows? these wild uncurbed loves are seldom of long duration. When he comes into Ryvendale, he

will naturally wish to take possession of his property, to spen a good deal of his time upon it; and how is it possible that he can bring his mistress there?—is it likely that he will ex pose himself to being cut dead by every woman in the county by nearly every man?

And if the duchess were forsaken by her lover, could he her uncle, bring her to The Towers, the happy home of he girlhood, to be within constant sight and hearing of the mar who had so deeply wronged her? He feels no anger agains Viva,—only such deep, unutterable pity as one may have fo some fair young creature doomed to the slow agony of a wasting disease.

How often in his heart has he tried to search out the cruel problem of life,—to understand the wherefore of the immeasurable anguish under which humanity groans! Why are the lures of joy and hope and gladness thrown out to young fresh hearts, only to bring them to grief and disappointment at last?

In the midst of his revery, Bernard Carlton's eyes fall on a portrait of himself taken in early manhood. It is placed between those of his father and mother. No one would imagine to look at him now that he had ever sat for that picture. It is a young, bright, eager face, full of life and hope; the brown eyes have a peculiarly trusting, confiding expression the brow is clear and open; under the curling hair you may well conjecture the organs of benevolence and veneration.

And when he sat to the artist of the day, life was a glad some thing to him; he rejoiced in it: the future seemed a storehouse of pleasures whence he could draw at will, and with no sparing hand. But on that day when Fortune filled his cup to overflowing, when the measure of his joy was full, she dashed it from his hand. And nevermore might he drink from that cup again: in all the after-years he asked no more, gained no more of Fate than that negative boon,—the absence of pain.

Why does the old memory come back to him to-day,—the memory banished, dead, buried all those long years ago? He sees himself in the mirror of the past: the mirror has been freshly burnished: never, he thinks, has he seen so clearly in it as to-day. He is standing by a fountain of clear water in a lovely garden; the water is flashing in the sunshine; fat gold-fish are eyeing him expectantly from the wide marble

oasin; birds are singing upon every branch; the scent of lilac and hawthorn loads the air; everything is bursting into joyous, grateful life; the earth sends up a universal pæan to the blue heavens; and he! no bird, no flower, no created thing, is more full of praise than he. It is his marriage-day. Five hours ago he stood at the altar with the fairest, sweetest piece of womanhood a happy lover ever called his own. That stately house on whose many windows the sun is shining holds his treasure: he looks eagerly up in the direction where he hopes to see her dear face. But why is she not out here with him in this paradise of flowers?—why is she not listening with happy blushes to the tender words his lips are hungering to pour into her ears? She is tired, he tells himself, loyally stifling a shadow of disappointment: the excitement, the agitation of leaving friends and family have naturally been trying to her delicate nerves. And there is all life before them: shall he begrudge her an hour or two of this day? He looks at the cloudless sky: it is set fair, he says to himself; how should nature be otherwise than in consonance with the exceeding joy of his heart?

And three months ago he had never dared to hope for this: he had thought in his foolish diffident heart that she cared nothing for him, nothing more at least than a girl might care for a friend; nay, he had fancied she was fond of that soldier cousin who was so much with her (and he laughs merrily at the bare idea). How fortunate that he made a confidante of her eldest sister, who put matters straight for them and brought about the bliss in which he is enveloped to-day. Dear, kind, good girl! Well, they must see if they cannot requite her goodness by finding a worthy husband for her: she is not a beauty like his darling Bell, but she is as good as gold. And to think, after all, that Bell had cared for him without his guessing it, without his daring to hope for such happiness! She had even seemed as eager as himself for their wedding-day; she had made no objections, no delays such as many women love to vex their lovers' souls with.

He looks at his watch. Only ten minutes past five: though the day is so fair and the scene so exquisite, certainly time lags when one has to spend it alone. He bethinks himself how on his arrival the butler had given him a weighty-looking letter which he thrust into his coat, thinking it would

keep a good many days without wanting to be opened. He flings himself down on the green sward beside the fountain and draws the letter from his pocket. Now he sees that *Important*, *Immediate*, are written on the envelope in large characters.

"Oh!" he reflects; "that was why the old fellow was in such a hurry to give it me! And I was rather inclined to think him officious for his pains." And he breaks the seal.

Ten minutes have elapsed.

Is this man, with the set deathly-pale face, the staring eyeballs, the clenched hands, the gallant young bridegroom who erewhile came bounding down the terrace steps? And, great heaven! is the sky still blue, the air laden with sunshine; are the birds still carolling their joyful songs? Can Nature witness the convulsions of a dying heart and smile on with her fair false face? Oh, yes! for what cares she? and, indeed, if she showed sympathy every time a human heart broke, why, there would be but one constant night of gloom and darkness. So the sun goes on shining, and the gnats, bathed in his glory, are making the most of their short brilliant life, and the big bees boom in and out of the flowers and sip the honey from their sweet hearts. After all, nothing is changed,—nothing but the hope of this one man's life. And what is he, by comparison, but a gnat exulting one moment in the great glad sun, and dashed to earth, crushed and broken, the next? Come, man, have courage; rise up; go to her; let her convince you that this is a lie,—a foul lie; take her fair face between your hands, look into her clear eyes, kiss her sweet red lips, and then, to-morrow, go seek that lying hound and cram his false words down his false throat. What! you will not? you believe it, then? Alas, yes! by the cursed light that came to him through the breaking of that seal he sees many things clearly now that in his blind, loving confidence he would not before allow to seem strange. And the sister!—that dear girl for whom he was half an hour ago weaving kind plans!—she must have known it too! she who laughed to scorn with such glib lips the thought of Bell having aught but a cousinly affection for the dashing Lancer.

He starts to his feet and hurries away,—whither he cares not: he only trembles lest he shall meet some one. He hurries along the wide turf walk and through the iron gates that

lead into the wood, and strides away over the green moss into the wood's heart. He is blind and deaf to Nature's beauty now: the exquisite coloring that is the spring's device, the golden patches of sunlight floating through the trees, the bloom of lilac and hawthorn, the carpet of wild thyme,—nothing arrests his eye, usually so keenly alive to all these things. The rabbits look aghast at this wild hurrying figure and scuttle off to their holes; the lordly pheasant turns tail and runs away; even the squirrels up in the tall fir-trees see there is something wrong. At last he reaches a hollow in the wood where is a great dark pool. No sunlight penetrates here: the water looks black and stagnant. A wild thought comes to him that here is an anodyne for the agony of his soul,—a minute's resolution, a plunge, and then an end to this intolerable pain. The world will think it an accident, for who ever heard of a bridegroom, married for love, drowning himself upon his wedding-day? He laughs a harsh discordant laugh.

Then he thinks of his mother. What! should he break her tender heart because of this treacherous woman? But can he support a life of dissimulation? can he live day by day in the sight of those who love him, under the searching gaze of a fond mother, and feign that all is well with him? No! that is impossible! he could not deceive a child if he wished it never so much. He has an alternative. It is in his power to brand this woman with shame,—to separate himself from her forever,—to be comparatively free again. But no! his mind recoils from that: he has a kind heart: deeply as she has wronged him, he cannot but pity her.

He stands there thinking until the sun has gone down, and the birds have left off singing, and twilight is stealing on. In the distance he hears the faint sound of a bell. He must go in now, and smile, and play a part: is it possible? can he do it even for an hour? He will try.

Bernard Carlton and his wife are sitting tête-à-tête at their first dinner. They are both acting, but each is too much occupied with their own rôle to notice what a miserable sham the other's performance is. The good-natured old butler observes the strangeness of their manner, but puts it down to the awkwardness of the situation. "I've heard lovers live on air," he remarks, later, "and these two haven't eat half an ounce between them."

Dinner is over. The pair have adjourned to "my lady's" boudoir. The discreet housekeeper, who is not without a spice of romance, has arranged it to perfection for the lovers. On a distant table stands a silver lamp shaded with a screen of colored flowers. It is just light enough to throw out the handsome luxurious objects in the room. There are choice bouquets of heavy scented hot-house flowers reposing in nests of cool green moss. The windows are thrown wide open to the fairy landscape lying in moonlight; the two most inviting chairs are drawn up to the window. And all for these lovers who would fain be a thousand miles apart!

Nevertheless they step out on the balcony and admire the scene. Down yonder winds the silver river like a bright snake, the nightingales are pouring a flood of song from their eager throats, the air is balmy as in July: ah! what a night for lovers! To look upon a scene like this with the hand of her you love in yours, her tender form clinging to your sheltering arm, what could you ask or the gods give more? But these two are standing apart, saying with cold lips and colder hearts that the scene is fair, that it is a lovely night, that they have never seen the moon so bright.

Presently the bride steps back into the room and takes one of the chairs near the window; a little later the bridegroom takes his. But they seem to have nothing to say to each other.

For the first time, it strikes Bell that something is wrong. Before this moment she was relieved by the absence of all lover-like demonstrations on Bernard's part; now she is getting a little frightened. Leaning back, she watches him furtively. Evidently, something is wrong. His face is haggard; his eyes have a far-off look; there is an occasional working of his mouth. Her heart almost stands still with terror. Oh, if he should have discovered anything! But no! she tells herself, that is impossible! he was so happy and joyful on their wedding-journey, and he can have learned nothing since then. She knows naught of the letter. But with inward terror she recognizes that this is no happy triumphant lover, this pale stern-faced man who avoids her eyes, who is so cold and silent.

She leans forward and puts her hand on his arm.

"Bernard," and she tries to bring a look of tenderness into her eyes and a smile to her lips, "how silent you are!"

He shrinks from her touch. Those slim white fingers, that thrilled him with such delight a few hours ago, sting him like serpents now. Then he turns to her, with righteous wrath and judgment in his eyes, saying,—

"Why have you blasted all my life?"

"What do you mean?" she mutters, sick with terror and apprehension.

"Your *lover*" (with withering scorn) "has favored me with a few of your letters and a statement of facts in his own hand."

As he speaks, Bernard draws them from his breast.

She falls at his feet, crying, "Oh, have mercy upon me!"

Then his pent-up anger and misery break forth.

"Why should I have pity upon you?" he cries. "What pity have you had on me? Why should I bear the brunt of your shame? Why should I permit you to dishonor the name I bear?"

But she lies grovelling at his feet and entreating him for mercy, and into his kind heart there creeps compassion even for one so unworthy.

No need to dwell longer upon the scene. Feeling himself utterly unable to dissemble before those who knew him, Bernard Carlton insisted upon taking his wife abroad; and there he remained, in spite of the wonder, remonstrances, entreaties, of parents and friends. Never once during the months that followed did he speak of the past to Bell; he was kind to her, for indeed her pale wan face, her broken heart, and shattered nerves might have moved pity in a less tender heart than his. Heaven showed them a tardy mercy: she died and was buried in Italy with her little dead child. At The Towers there was much mourning over the prematurely-born heir, but Bernard Carlton breathed once more and held up his bowed head.

When his mother saw him again after long months of absence, she was utterly shocked at his altered looks.

"Poor boy! Bell's death has completely broken him down!" she told her friends.

He could not stay at home, nor take up the old pursuits, so he wandered over the face of the earth in search of relief, forgetting, as people are wont to do who seek solace from grief in travel, that wherever you go you must needs take your own

heart with you. He travelled; he read,—read greedily every book that tended to prove religion false and that there is no hereafter. He became an utter sceptic,—believed in nothing, no one. Human nature was irredeemably bad; man was a puppet pulled by strings which some remorseless Juggernaut held. He would not believe or trust any living human being.

And then, as the sea subsides after its passionate fury is spent, his heart gradually stilled and calmed, and the finer qualities of his nature again came to the surface. His anger against mankind melted into an intense pity: he was no longer a harsh judge, but a pitying merciful one who saw behind sin and error the extenuating circumstances that wash away the blackest part of guilt. He had grown to know the world, to read character with rare correctness, to follow the workings of a heart like the movement of a watch.

And as he sits, communing with his own thoughts, he is seeing all the horror of the life to come for Viva, and he is already, in his infinite compassion, meditating how he can in the future alleviate the woe that must infallibly follow the fatal step she has taken. He goes to his writing-table and pens the following lines:

"DEAR VIVA,—

"Do not fear to read my letter: you will find no reproaches in it. My poor girl! your punishment will be heavy enough without my trying to add to it by one feather weight. You do not want me now, but a day may come when you will be glad to remember that you have one true friend. Then send for me without hesitation or fear.

"BERNARD CARLTON."

But the letter lies a long time in his desk for want of an address. It is not until two months later that it reaches the Duchess de Lallière, now called Lady Ryvendale, at Sorrento.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LADY RYVENDALE'S "WORD IN SEASON."

THE first act of the drama is played; the curtain is drawn, for the moment, over the picture of suffering, temptation, and wrong. Let me paint you a brighter, fairer scene, one wherein the strife of passions enters not, but where the reigning deities are pleasantness and peace. Come, then, and stand with me on the snowy doorstep of this quaint, old, red house, and get the warmth and sweetness of the fair June morning into your veins; breathe the balmy west wind, that has whispered into the roses' hearts and throws you wantonly their secrets as he goes by; rejoice for a moment in the odorous warmth; let the sun kiss your brow and throat. Look before you at the shaven lawn and its grand old cedars; note the trim flower-beds, and that long alley of rose-bushes, and then glance to yonder meadow, where the sleek cattle are browsing, and the mares stand swishing their long tails, and watching the gambols of their foals.

That brilliant, silver ribbon below, is a trout stream, and many a fine fish falls a victim to the innocent-looking, tempting little fly that the skilled hand of the rector knows so well how to throw.

And now let us steal through this open window whence issues so savory and appetizing a smell. Here are two fair maidens, giving the finishing-touches to the breakfast-table. What charming faces! Now, if I had my brush, instead of my pen (and skill to wield it), what a delicious picture I could paint for you!

They are sisters, these two, but not alike, except in the extreme beauty and delicacy of their complexions: the elder has a sweet, serious face, the younger is bright, and arch, and bubbling over with high spirits. If you were in a gay mood, what a merry companion you would find Riette! but if you were troubled and sorrowful, you would fly for sympathy and

comfort to Osyth's tender breast, and of a surety find it there. Quaint names, to each of which hangs a tale that shall be told in due season.

"Look!" says Riette, triumphantly presenting to her sister's gaze a dish of the biggest, reddest, most tempting strawberries.

"Delicious! How papa will enjoy them! Have you called him, darling?"

Riette is, in truth, the darling of her father and sister, and is oftener called that endearing name by them than her own fanciful one.

"No; but I will. There he is, hunting caterpillars in the roses!" And Riette flies through the window, with her terrier at her heels. A huge tabby cat, basking on the low window-ledge, looks disgustedly round at this rude interruption of his slumbers, but, being at the same time made conscious of the vicinity of broiled fish, he shakes himself, and comes in at the window with a yawn and a prolonged stretch.

Riette and her father are coming up the garden. The rector is a tall man of about sixty, with a slight stoop, and the most benevolent face in the world. You need only one look at him to be quite sure that here is a shepherd who guides his sheep by love, who preaches heaven, not hell, to them, who understands how, with the poor, the need of the body makes itself more pressingly felt than the need of the soul, and that while you minister to one you must not forget the other.

Riette hangs upon his arm, laughing and chattering. Bob, the terrier, jumps up at him, to assert his right to a share of notice. Osyth meets him at the window with a good-morning kiss. The cat rubs up against his legs.

"Go away, you cats and dogs!" says the rector, in mild remonstrance: "do you see what havoc you are making with my Sunday trousers?"

"Oh, papa!" cries Riette. "Are the poor things not to be affectionate and glad to see you because it is Sunday? What an uncharitable doctrine! And after all, you know" (archly), "it matters less than any other day, because your legs are hidden. Now please to shut your eyes!" And she runs to the sideboard for the strawberries, and pops them under his nose. "Now open."

"Upon my word," says the rector, feasting his eyes, "they are almost too beautiful to be eaten."

"We shall see," laughs Riette, beginning, with swift fingers, to rob them of their stalks.

"Do not give me all the largest, darling," protests the rector.

"They are too big for Osyth and me," answers saucy Riette: "they would not go into our little mouths." And she continues her occupation.

"I hear Lord Ryvendale came down last night," says Mr. Sartoris, addressing his elder daughter.

"I wonder if he will come to church to-day," cries Riette, eagerly. "Oh, I wish he would! What a wicked man he must be, never to go to church! Papa, why don't you remonstrate with him as you did with Jack Styles?"

The rector's eyes twinkle.

"You know, my dear," he answers, "it is always easier to make personal remarks to a man in Jack Styles's position than in Lord Ryvendale's, and perhaps 'my lord' might not make me such an obliging answer as poor Jack's."

"What was that, papa?" asks Osyth.

"'Well, sir,' he said, 'if it 'ud be doin' of you any pertikler favor, I don't mind goin' once and again, but I don't suppose (meanin' no offence) I should hear anything I haven't heerd before, and it's a precious sight pleasanter out in the fields of a Sunday mornin' than it is in church.'"

"Oh, papa! and what did you say?"

"Well, darling," returns the rector, with a comical twist of his mouth, "I confess that, for the moment, I was rather at a loss. After he left me, one or two admirable rejoinders occurred to me; but unfortunately they came too late."

Riette does not know the reason that is supposed to prevent Lord Ryvendale appearing at church or showing himself very much in the neighborhood. The rector does, and so does Osyth, for it is impossible to be a constant visitor of the poor and not to hear the scandals, both in high and in low life, which are their favorite topics of conversation. But Riette is as innocent as a baby: sheltered by the love and care of her father and sister, she has what, after all, is the most certain innocence whilst it lasts,—ignorance. So she knows nothing of the popular tradition that Lord Ryvendale has run away with the

wife of a French duke, that he is under the thraldom of this wicked woman, who keeps him in a life of sin and bondage and prevents him from settling down at Ryvendale and marrying and being happy.

His sister-in-law, Lady Ryvendale, still lives at The Court with a companion, and from time to time he visits her there. She is devoted to him, and burns to set him free from his "wretched entanglement" and to see him useful and honored in his county.

A buoyant step crunches the gravel: in another moment a bright face looks in at the window, and a cheery voice cries,—

"How are you all?"

"Otho!" exclaim both the girls, and the rector, whose back is turned to him, looks round with a smile of welcome.

"Isn't this an apparition?" says the young fellow, coming in and shaking them all heartily by the hand. "And, though I am got up for church parade, I haven't breakfasted: so I hope you'll let me share the remains with Bob and Tom."

It is very evident that this blithesome young gentleman is a prime favorite at the rectory, from the heartiness of his welcome and the alacrity with which every one prepares to attend to his wants. Osyth rings for a cup and saucer, the rector helps him to trout, and Riette is diving into the dish for the best of the remaining strawberries.

"And how is Sir George?" asks Osyth.

"Poor dear old fellow! he had one of his attacks in the night: that is why I am here. Matthew came to me the first thing this morning, to say that, as he would probably be unable to see me all day, I had better come over to you. Very cheeky of me to be so sure of my welcome, eh, sir?" And the young man looks up to the rector with the most perfect confidence in the latter's rejoinder.

"Where should you go, my boy, if not to us?" is the hearty reply.

"Lord Ryvendale is down," cries Riette, who is quite full of the news. "Oh, Otho! *do* you think there is any chance of his being at church? I want him reformed. I think it is quite wrong of papa and Osyth not to try to convert him from the error of his ways, and I am sure Osie could convert any one. Now, if he were a poor man," continues the little chatterbox, "they would both have been at him long ago, and,

being rich, he wants it all the more, because, you know about the rich man and the eye of the needle. Otho, why do you think he does not come to church?"

"Perhaps he thinks it better taste to——" stop away, Otho is going to add, when, remembering who his interlocutor is, he blushes furiously and stops. The rector comes to his rescue, and adroitly turns the conversation.

To the immense surprise of every one, Lord Ryvendale makes his appearance in church this very morning. Riette is a good little girl, and says her prayers most reverently and devoutly as a rule, but this morning her thoughts are very far astray, and, though she repeats all the responses automatically, she wakes with a start at the prayer of St. Chrysostom, and is ashamed and repentant to find she has not been actually conscious of a word of the prayers since the Belief.

But with Osyth it is different: no human or worldly thought comes into her pure devout heart: she is with her God, and all that is passing around is, by comparison, far from her.

Lord Ryvendale, restless and uneasy, not hearing a word of the service, but intent on his own thoughts, is struck by the devout attitude of this pale fair saint: when the prayers are about half over, his attention becomes riveted upon her: only to watch her gives a sense of repose to his weary, world-worn heart.

He occupies a position in which he can alike see and be seen. The old-fashioned pew is a small gallery of black, carved oak, raised by about a dozen steps from the ground, and resembling nothing so much as a vast opera-box. The servants' pew adjoins, but is separated from it by glass windows. Truly, there was a grand distinction in days gone by between rich and poor, and in one's secret heart one is more than half disposed at times to regret the breaking of the barriers to-day.

Lady Ryvendale, kneeling on her crimson cushion, her face buried in her delicately-gloved hands, is as wandering and *distraite* as Riette. She is triumphant at having at last succeeded in bringing the Prodigal to church, and she is wondering whether he will take a fancy to either of the rector's charming daughters, to whom she means to introduce him after the service. It is only a year since Mr. Sartoris was presented with the living by Sir George Desmond, Otho's uncle, and Alsager has always gently opposed her wish to make him

known to the rector and his family. Lady Ryvendale does not like the service in her own church,—she considers the vicar narrow-minded, and illiberal,—so she drives over every fine Sunday to Mr. Sartoris's church, where Sir George has placed his pew at her disposal. Otho, who dislikes solitary grandeur, invariably occupies the rector's seat.

Lady Ryvendale's horses are pawing and stamping at the church gate, but her ladyship is not ready to start just yet. She lingers until Osyth and Riette come out, and proceeds to introduce her brother-in-law to them. Then she invites herself to walk round the rectory garden, and falls to animated conversation with Mr. Sartoris. Otho and Riette have gone off together, and Lord Ryvendale is left with Osyth.

Being so good and pure a maiden, and knowing that this man is a sinner, one might think she would feel a shrinking from him; but such is far from being the case. She regards him with a sincere pity, that, were he conscious of it, would bring a smile to his lips.

To the fashionably brought-up girls of to-day, Lord Ryvendale's offence would seem of the most venial order, and would, if anything, only heighten their interest in him; to Osyth, he is a man smitten with a moral plague, to be pitied, and prayed for, as though he were suffering from some sore bodily disease. Sin is to her the most terrible thing in the world; unrepented sin—sin by which souls are lost—is more awful, in her eyes. than any pain, or grief, that can assail the human frame. And whilst she is talking simply to him of flowers and commonplace matters, she is saying in her heart, "Oh, if it would please God to save this poor sinner's soul!" "A poor sinner!" That is all Lord Ryvendale, charming, rich, titled, courted by women, seems to her. And there is that in his face and voice and manner that appeals to her and makes her think still more how sad it is that a man with all the qualities he seems to possess should yet be a castaway.

Presently they are joined by Otho and Riette. Strange to say, Riette, whom nine men out of ten would find most piquante, produces little impression upon Lord Ryvendale; it is Osyth who charms him, who inspires in him a delightful feeling of tranquillity and rest. Riette's vivacity and Otho's high spirits are almost oppressive to him: he feels that he would like to sit all the summer afternoon in the low chair

under yon cedar, and listen to Osyth's soft, calm voice. No matter what she said: she might even read him a sermon, a thing his soul abhorred, but the very sound of her voice was to his heart what a cool green bank might be to a tired wayfarer.

He is restless, dissatisfied. He has made a grievous mistake, and is alive and awake to it. His sin has found him out. His life is spoiled: he is banished from that particular sphere of usefulness which seems to him now the most desirable. He would like to live at Ryvendale, to look after his property, to take his own place in the county; but it is impossible, and therefore all the dearer, the more desirable. He wonders to-day at the infatuation of two years and a half ago, —wonders and deplores; yet it cannot be undone. Honor and duty bind him to what is thraldom now, but then seemed heaven. How could he know that the fruit which looked so lovely had so bitter a taste?

"What do you think of the new rector?" Lady Ryvendale asks him, as they are driving homewards.

"A very good fellow, and a thorough gentleman," Alsager replies, cordially. "His sermon lasted exactly sixteen minutes."

"And I thought what he said was excellent," pursues Lady Ryvendale, "particularly his reference to the small duties of life."

"Yes," assents Alsager, who, however, does not remember one word of the discourse. Its brevity was its sole charm for him. "How came Sir George to light upon him?"

"He was an old college friend, I believe, and more than half educated young Desmond. That boy spends most of his time at the rectory: he will marry one of the girls some of these days."

"The younger, perhaps," says Alsager. "She is a bright little thing, and he seems very devoted to her."

"Oh, as for that, it is sometimes one and sometimes the other. He always declares that he is so dreadfully in love with both, it would be impossible for him to marry only one And I rather think, in his heart of hearts, he is fondest of the elder."

"Absurd!" says Alsager.

"Why absurd? How old do you take Osyth to be? She is only twenty, and Otho is twenty-two."

"Osyth!" repeats Lord Ryvendale. "What a strange name!"

"Yes; she is called after some Saxon saint,—I forget why. You must ask her to tell you some day."

"Saint Osyth," murmurs Alsager, half to himself.

"And what do you think of her?"

"*She is charming!*" he answers, and then stops short, feeling a sudden shock at his heart. A memory flashes across him of how, once before, he used the same words, with the same intonation. For the moment, he is again standing beside the ambassador when the doors are flung open and the lovely Duchess de Lallière glides in, in all the zenith of her beauty and happiness. Between this time and then, he has called many a woman charming, but the word has not, until to-day, brought that picture back to him.

"Yes," responds Lady Ryvendale, with enthusiasm, "she is charming. And she is so good: the poor simply worship her; indeed, so does every one who knows her. And it is not the sort of goodness that repels people,—that says, 'Stand aside, I am holier than thou!' but it is the perfection of love, and charity, and universal sympathy. Oh, Alsager!" and Lady Ryvendale turns to him with a sudden tremulousness of the lips, a glistening of the eyes, "ever since I have known her, I have felt that she was the wife for you. She would make you so happy; she would alter all your life. Oh! my dear! you are not happy now. I can see the listlessness and discontent that is creeping over you month by month. Shake off these fetters and be free, and happy, and useful in the world again."

Never before has Lady Ryvendale spoken thus openly to her brother-in-law; but now she is determined, come what may, to say to him what has been all this time in her heart.

"You forget, Gertrude," he answers, gently, looking away, "it is *impossible* that I should marry."

"Why impossible?" she cries, impetuously. "A connection of that kind cannot last forever: it never does. The duke is not in the least likely to die. You cannot marry her. Do you forget that you are living in open defiance of God's laws, of the laws of society?—that as long as you continue as you are, you are shutting yourself out from your proper interests and duties in life? And this—this woman does not make

you happy. I can see that, by the way in which you are plunging into dissipation. You are trying to get away from her and from yourself. I see your name at races, at all kind of fast places, with fast people. I don't deny that they are many of them in your own rank of life, but it is not the set you used to mix with. Oh, Alsager!" (putting her hand on his arm), "only think if you had the constant companionship of a pure, good woman, how different your life would be,—if you were here surrounded by the interests that befit your age and rank, instead of throwing yourself into wild, godless amusements, that are, after all, so hollow and empty of pleasure to a man like you,—if you had little, darling children about you, to bring out all the best and purest instincts of your heart,—what a life you might even yet look forward to!"

At this moment the carriage pulls up at the house, and Lord Ryvendale, jumping out, helps his sister-in-law to alight. Then, without another word, he walks away to his own room, and Lady Ryvendale, in some trepidation, but with a certain feeling of triumph at having spoken her "word in season," mounts the broad staircase to her boudoir.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A CLUSTER OF FORGET-ME-NOTS.

AFTERNOON service is over: Osyth has gone to the village on an errand of mercy; the rector is recruiting himself by a nap in his study after the fatigues of the day; and Otho is lying at Riette's feet, under the cedar.

"How deliciously cool you look!" he is remarking to her. "I wish I were a girl, and could wear white muslin and blue ribbons on a day like this."

"You would make a sweet girl," answers Riette, saucily. "And how nice your dear little hands would look, peeping out from a lace sleeve!"

Otho lifts one of his hands to contemplate. He eyes it gravely, and without dissatisfaction, for, though it is bronzed, it is extremely well shaped.

"Please to remember," he says, complacently, "that this member has wielded a bat in the Eton eleven, and made itself a great deal more useful in its generation than that little paw of yours. I say, Riette" (tilting his straw hat over his eyes and looking up at her pretty face), "I wish I did not feel so confoundedly like your brother! then I could beguile this long afternoon by making love to you."

"Try!" says Riette. "I should like of all things to be made love to."

Otho lifts himself up on one elbow and utters, languidly,—

"My angel, I adore you!"

"Oh!" says Riette, laughing, and showing two even rows of little pearls, "what an exciting declaration! No" (relapsing into seriousness), "you will never do. *My* lover must be all fire, and fury, and despair. All the love I have ever read about has been an exciting sort of thing; otherwise it wouldn't be at all interesting. Now do you know" (reflectively), "I should think Lord Ryvendale would make love very well."

Otho springs to a sitting posture.

"And pray, Miss Innocence, what do you know about such things?" he cries, looking at her, half amazed, half angry.

"Nothing, my dear boy, I am sorry to say," she answers, coolly. "I should like to. I wish Lord Ryvendale would make love to me."

"A nice sort of fellow to make love to an innocent young girl!" cries Otho, hotly.

"What do you mean?" asks Riette, opening her eyes, and Otho, ashamed of the indiscretion into which he has been betrayed, stammers a little, and says,—

"Why, he is a regular man of the world, of course, and much too old for you."

"But I should like a regular man of the world," replies Riette, perversely: "he could tell one so much, and be so amusing. I wouldn't think of marrying a very young man."

"Oh, indeed," says Otho, shortly. "Well, then, you had better lay yourself out for the conquest of Lord Ryvendale."

Riette shakes her pretty head sagaciously.

"It would be no use. Shall I tell you something?" And she looks mysteriously about her; then, stooping her face to him, she whispers,—

"I believe he is going to fall in love with Osyth."

Otho looks incredulous.

"What an idea!" he says, with a certain contemptuous inflection of his voice. "Now, what put that into your head, I should like to know?"

"Why, when she was talking to him, he hardly took his eyes off her: it was not in the least the same way that he looked at me: indeed, when you and I came up, I saw he thought us a nuisance. And he has lovely eyes. I know if he looked at me like that, I should fall straightway head over ears in love with him."

Otho feels considerably nettled. For years he has had these two charming girls all to himself,—his only difficulty has been to know which he is fonder of,—and here comes a stranger upon the scene and threatens to rob him of the affections of one, if not both. But no! he argues; Osyth is too pure, too good, to care for a man with such a reputation as Lord Ryvendale's. And yet she did not seem to shrink from him to-day, though she, at least, must know the story of his life.

He drums on the grass with one hand, and his good-looking, open face assumes a slightly sulky expression.

"Well," he remarks, significantly, after a pause, "all I can say is that *I* should be very sorry for either of you to have anything to do with Ryvendale."

"And why, pray?" asks Riette. "You are a regular dog in the manger. You know you can't marry us both, and you can never make up your mind which you like the best. So if somebody married one of us, it would simplify matters very much for you."

"Anyhow," retorts Otho, "I'd rather, for your own sakes, that it wasn't Ryvendale."

Riette regards him attentively for a moment; then she says, coaxingly,—

"Otho, I wish you would tell me about Lord Ryvendale. What is there in him that makes people look strange when they speak of him, as though there were some great mystery about him? I am sure Osyth knows; but when I asked her she turned the conversation. And one day I heard some one say it was such a sad pity he could not live at Ryvendale. Why can't he?"

Otho assumes a discreet and important air.

"Little girls should not want to know too much. They are not intended to hear everything."

"I am not a little girl," retorts Riette, indignantly. "I was seventeen last month. And pray, why shouldn't I know things as well as other people? Otho" (affectionately), "there's a dear boy, *do* tell me!"

Now, it is Sunday afternoon: the time hangs rather heavily on hand, and Otho feels considerably tempted to gratify Riette's curiosity. The consciousness that it will be doing wrong lends a certain piquancy to the thought. But then the idea occurs to him that it would be exceedingly improper of him to allow this innocent young creature to conceive romantic notions about a man of Lord Ryvendale's character, and that it is almost his duty, as a brother, to warn her against him.

He is looking thoughtfully away towards the trout-stream, and Riette, whose perceptions are extremely quick, sees that there are pros and cons going on in his mind as to the propriety of gratifying her curiosity.

So, after a moment, she repeats, in her sweetest and most coaxing voice,—

"*Do* tell me, there's a dear boy! It is so stupid for me not to know what everybody else does."

"I should not think of telling you," he answers, with some severity, for he wants to justify himself to his own conscience, "merely for the sake of satisfying your inquisitiveness; only, as you seem to have taken such a fancy to the fellow, it is just as well for you to know it's no good——"

"No good?" echoes Riette, pricking up her ears, and jumping to a conclusion at once. "Oh, then he is married!"

"As good as married," answers Otho, looking the other way.

"You mean he is engaged. Well, I don't see anything in that to make a mystery about."

"Look here, Riette," says Otho, turning suddenly towards her: "if I tell you, you must promise me never to breathe a syllable to any one, and you are not to ask me any more than what I choose to tell you."

"I promise," cries Riette, breathlessly, her eyes glistening at the thought of hearing a secret.

"You know Mr. Carlton."

"Yes, dear old man! I wish he was not so much away from The Towers."

"Did you ever hear that he had a niece?"

"Yes; she married a French duke."

"Do you know anything more about her?"

"No."

There is a long pause.

"Well?" cries Riette, eagerly.

"Well," repeats Otho, turning his face quite away this time, and speaking in a very low voice, "Ryvendale ran away with her, nearly three years ago. That is why he cannot marry."

A dozen questions are on Riette's lips, but she does not utter them: some undefined feeling keeps her silent. But Otho's revelation takes this shape in her mind, a mind which, all innocent as it is, has the true instincts of her sex,—that Lord Ryvendale is the victim of a wicked woman, and, as such, is to be looked upon with intense interest, curiosity, and sympathy.

"Let us go down to the river!" exclaims Otho, abruptly, feeling a little ashamed of himself.

He jumps up as he speaks, and Riette trips off to the house for her hat. Somehow she is conscious of feeling older, more important, than she did ten minutes ago. Neither she nor Otho alludes to Lord Ryvendale again, as they saunter down across the meadows to the river, closely attended by Bob.

Otho is nephew and heir to Sir George Desmond of Helmstone Park in Southshire, and Desmond Woods in Blankshire. For many years Sir George has been a great sufferer from injuries caused by a railway accident. For days together, he is often unable to see any one but his medical attendant and his servant. For all that, he is the kindest-hearted, most cheerful person in the world; his greatest delight is to contribute to the enjoyment of those about him, and never is his name missing from a subscription-list the object of which is to relieve suffering. He is devoted to Otho, and knows not how to refuse him anything that his heart desires. Fortunately, Otho has so good a heart and temper that he is unspoiled by advantages which might tend to make many a young fellow selfish and proud. Mr. Sartoris had been a college friend of Sir George's, and owed to him, first, the small living at Desmond Woods, and now the handsome one of Helmstone. Sir George had frequently augmented the rector's income by

nominally putting Otho under his charge, and the lad had grown up from childhood with Osyth and Riette, either of whom Sir George was prepared most cordially to receive as a niece-in-law. There was nothing wanting but for Otho to make up his mind which it was to be; and Sir George smiled to himself, and said there was plenty of time for that.

Otho has spent a couple of seasons in London, and has been made much of, as a good *parti* invariably is, particularly if he have good looks and manners in addition to his other attractions. But he has come back gladly to Sir George and his friends at the rectory.

Otho and Riette are wandering along the banks of the little river, which runs blithely along, making a faint swish and swirl, sometimes, round a big stone. The sun is lower in the heavens now: his heat is waning, but his light is richer and mellower as he stoops nearer to earth and kisses the leaves and the little field-flowers and the forget-me-nots on the bank with a golden kiss. He shines into the two young people's bright eyes, and on their fresh faces, till each is struck by the thought of how good the other is to look at. But, if they think it, they do not say it, being too much at home with each other for compliments.

"This is the last walk we shall have together for some time, I suppose," remarks Riette, presently. "You'll be so much taken up with Charlie—or Mr. Egerton, I suppose I ought to call him—that we shall not see anything of you at the rectory."

"It is quite on the cards that you'll see a good deal more of me," replies Otho. "We can't shoot, and fishing is slow work. We must get up some picnics, and persuade Osyth to leave her everlasting poor and come too, and the rector, to play propriety. Dear old Charlie! I am awfully glad he's coming though. I wish I were a soldier!"

"Oh, it's quite enough for you to play at soldiering with your Yeomanry," laughs Riette, "and I'm sure you couldn't have a more becoming dress if you were in the real army."

"I suppose you hardly remember him, eh, Riette? It is four years since he was at Desmond Woods, when the rector was cramming me. He had just got his commission."

"Not remember him, indeed!" retorts Riette. "I don't see so many young men that I am likely to forget one,—es-

pecially a soldier. Don't you recollect how you and he both dressed up in his uniform? But you did not make half such a dashing soldier as he did. He had a little, dark moustache, and looked quite fierce."

"He looks much fiercer now," answers Otho, "and the little dark moustache is a large, black one."

"How delightful!" cries Riette.

Otho stops suddenly short.

"Now look here, Riette," he says, catching her by the hand. "I'm not going to stand any nonsense. If you flirt with Charlie, I shall have to shoot him, because you know you are as good as engaged to me."

"And what about Osyth?" asks her sister, maliciously.

"Oh! I don't believe Osyth will ever marry," returns Otho. "If I thought she would have me, I would let you marry Charlie like a shot. But no! she would never leave the rector and her poor: so I expect it will be you and me. I'm bound to have one of you."

"Well, yes, I suppose it will come to that," answers Riette, naïvely. "But it's rather stupid work being so sure of each other. Otho dear" (coaxingly), "it's not in the least likely, but if Charlie—Mr. Egerton I mean—should happen to take a fancy to me, would you mind my flirting with him, just ever such a little bit?"

"Of course I should mind!" answers Otho, energetically, "mind very much indeed. Now, Riette, I tell you I won't have it; so you had better not try it on."

"Well," answers Riette, placidly, "I only thought that it would be so much pleasanter for both of us if you could get a little bit jealous and make a scene. You would be able then to fancy you were in love with me."

"And so I am in love with you," he says, turning towards her with some warmth, and finding her ten times prettier and more lovable than he had done the minute before.

Naughty little Riette thinks to herself that if Otho's affection and admiration are so stimulated by the mere hint of a rival, the actual fact will make their courtship much more exciting and interesting. Her views are rather of a naïve and original kind. At some far-distant day, Otho will marry either Osyth or her, and whether he is to be her husband or her brother is a matter of very little importance in her eyes.

From all this the reader will justly infer that these two young people are not, in the remotest sense of the word, in love with each other.

"What is the time?" asks Otho. "I am very hungry."

Riette takes out a watch set round with pearls, Sir George's last birthday-present to her. Her family and friends have not yet left off asking her the time, in order to give her the gratification of producing it.

"A quarter-past seven. Nearly tea-time, thank goodness!"

"It is a horrid bore having tea instead of dinner on Sundays," says Otho. "We won't do that, Riette."

"No," assents Riette, complaisantly. "Though, as far as I am concerned, I rather prefer it, as I do not drink wine, and I love hot cakes."

"Well, I am ready for tea or dinner or both!" exclaims Otho. "So come along!"

"Wait a moment," cries Riette. "I must take some forget-me-nots home with me. See! there is a lovely cluster a little lower down."

When, however, they arrive at the spot, the object of Riette's desire is not so easy of attainment as she fancied. Otho tries first to get the coveted flowers by lying on the bank and stretching his arms towards them, but they are a good foot from his grasp. The place where they grow looks decidedly "squelchy," as Riette suggests.

"Not to be done!" he says, turning to look up in the girl's eager face.

"Oh!" she ejaculates, in a disappointed voice.

Without making any further effort, he rises and prepares to walk back to the house with her.

Riette feels that this is not at all lover-like: she is displeased.

"I must wait till next week, I suppose," she remarks, demurely. "I will ask Charlie to get them for me."

Otho utters an angry exclamation, and, turning hastily back, jumps off the bank ankle-deep into the mud, drags up the flowers by the roots, and in another moment, flushed and mud-stained, is by Riette's side.

"Oh!" cries Riette, half concerned, half exultant.

"I hope you are gratified," says Otho, rather stiffly, looking with disgust at his ruined patent-leather shoes.

"I am sorry about your shoes, but it was quite right, you

know. Any lover who was worth anything ought to have done it."

"You are getting just like a woman," says Otho, in a tone which scarcely intimates that a compliment is intended.

"I always thought I should, if I lived long enough," returns Riette, tranquilly.

"You are a capricious little monkey!" he retorts; but, somehow, she has risen inestimably in importance in his eyes on this particular Sunday afternoon.

Then they proceed very amicably together towards the house, where the rector and Osyth are waiting tea for them, and presently the room is ringing with their blithe young laughter.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

### WEARY AND WORLD-WORN.

LADY RYVENDALE was extremely well satisfied with the events of Sunday. She had succeeded in getting her brother-in-law to church, had introduced him to Osyth Sartoris, who evidently made an impression upon him, and had been able to say that "word in season," which, for months past, she had been burning to speak. And he had not resented it. When they met at lunch, his manner was even kinder, more affectionate, than usual. From this she augured so favorably that in the afternoon she sent a note to the rectory, inviting Mr. Sartoris and his daughters to dine with her on the following day on the chance of persuading Lord Ryvendale to stay until Tuesday. As a rule, his visits only extended from Friday or Saturday until Monday.

Lady Ryvendale was a good, kind-hearted, unselfish woman. Like most of her sex, she had a peculiar aptitude for looking at things from one point of view and utterly declining to regard them from any other. Right was right, and wrong, wrong: therefore there could be no ameliorating circumstances to reduce a wrong,—no justice in permitting right to diverge from her strict course aside into the sweet, sheltering paths of charity. She had set a goal for herself, and went

resolutely towards it. This was to separate Lord Ryvendale from Viva. She could be tender-hearted and charitable to most sins and sinners. Alsager's wrong-doing was almost venial in her eyes, and then he was to be weaned from it; but with regard to Viva, Byron's words were as true of Gertrude Ryvendale as they are of all good women,—

> "And every woe a tear can claim,
> Except an erring sister's shame."

She has quite forgotten that the Viva of olden days was a delicate, sensitive, high-minded girl: she only remembers her to class her with the vilest and most castaway of her sex. She does not stop to consider that a sweet, unsophisticated maiden like Osyth, totally and happily ignorant of the world and its ways, would hardly be the wife most calculated to influence and to preserve the affection of a man such as Alsager, whose whole life has been spent in society and in search of amusement, however much she might attract him in the first instance.

Gertrude expects a miracle. The Prodigal is to return all at once from his evil ways, to shake the dust of error from his feet, and to settle down immediately into an utterly new life, from which he shall never more desire to depart. He is to adore his wife, and, in due course, his children; he is to exchange brilliant and exciting pleasures for tranquil and wholesome ones; all his old habits, customs, ways of thinking, are to be cast from him, with no more effort than the throwing off of an old coat. He is no longer to be the man of the world, but the country gentleman. To the wonderful and unpractical faith of a woman like Lady Ryvendale, all this seems not only possible, but a simple matter of course. It is merely a question of finding him a wife of the right sort.

Her desire for Alsager's good is perfectly sincere, and eminently unselfish, for it will be no light matter for her to give up Ryvendale, where she is as much mistress as in her husband's lifetime,—nay, more, for her sway now is absolute: Alsager leaves the management of the house and grounds entirely to her. He never comes to the place without a secret pang that he cannot make his home here: there is hardly a more charming country-seat in all England than Ryvendale Court. Two years ago his most ardent wish was to spend the

rest of his life here, with the woman whom he adored: it is a long time now since he has thought of it in connection with her, or desired to hear the delicate *frôlement* of her dress along the stately, oaken galleries. If it were hinted to him that he no longer loved Viva, he would refute the idea with indignation; but in truth a weariness has sprung up in his heart; he would give ten years of his life (for her sake, he tells himself) that she should again be the proud, admired Duchess de Lallière, and that his own life were still free to make or mar. *He cannot leave her!* It is the impotent sense of bondage that is death to a man's love: he is far more tied than a husband to a wife: a wife has friends, society, resources apart from her husband: a woman in Viva's position has no one, nothing on earth, but the man for whom she has sacrificed all. When a man begins to feel that he has been a fool and a madman, the death-blow to the woman's heart is struck. And there was never yet in the world a man placed like Alsager who did not come to feel it in time, even though he remained with the woman he had betrayed to her life's end.

Lady Ryvendale's words went but too well home to Alsager's heart. He had arrived at a stage of his life in which everything seemed a trouble and weariness to him: his great need was repose. The feverish excitement which he had courted of late, whilst not satisfying him at the time, left a greater lassitude and despondency behind it: his naturally smooth and cheerful temper was growing irritable. Hard riding and shooting gave him a resource in the winter, but now there was nothing to do. He would like to get away,—to go round the world, to do anything, in fact, but what he was doing. In former days, fishing had been a favorite amusement with him, but now he could not endure the solitude of it, nor the grim thoughts that bore him company whenever he was alone.

The livelong Sunday afternoon he sat under a big tree in the lovely gardens, and looked away, over the brilliant parterres, to the peaceful valley and its winding stream beneath. He scarcely saw them: he was in the quiet church again, looking at that sweet, pure face, with its serene expression, that had in it no single line scored by the pains and strifes and passions of life. Only to look at her, to think of her, seemed to banish evil and misery to an immeasurable distance. If,

now, circumstances had been different,—if he had never met the duchess,—if she had been resolute to the last in turning a deaf ear to his entreaties, he would have been living here in his own home now; he would have been thrown in the society of this fair, good girl; perhaps? who knows?—and his thoughts travel away to the picture that Gertrude had drawn for him a few hours ago. He forgets his once wild, absorbing passion for the duchess: indeed, all passion seems hateful to him now; calm tranquil love and security are the only things desirable and worth having; any other thought linked with that pale, flower-like maiden would be profanation. She is like a tall white lily; she is like one of the saints in the Florentine and Roman galleries; nay, more like to the Saint Cecilia in Dresden, with her rapt, pale face bent over the keys of the organ, and her white lilies beside her. It pleases him to think that she is called after a saint. And then he falls to wondering if she knows his story, if that dark page of his life has been opened for her, and, if so, what sort of figure he must make in that pure heart of hers. He had not read any shrinking in her serene gaze: when he offered to take her hand at parting, she had given it simply and unhesitatingly. For the first time in his life on this quiet, Sunday afternoon, Alsager awoke to the conviction that he was a sinner,—that his life had been such as he would shrink from a woman knowing, whose love and respect he desired to win. But, be it well understood, this thought had no reference to Viva, who, save for her sad connection with him, was as irreproachable, as unsullied of heart and life, as the most faithful wife in Christendom.

Lord Ryvendale roused himself with a start. Of what avail these thoughts? This maiden, who has given him a momentary glimpse of a better life, can never be anything to him. Some day, perhaps, she will meet with a man worthy of her, to whom she will make life a foretaste of heaven, or (and he likes the thought better) she will continue her pure, maidenly life, ministering to the poor and sick, and blessing the lives of all who come under her sweet influence.

And he,—he will go back to his hollow life, go on trying to kill time and thought and regret with those other poor pleasure-seekers who, like himself, only desire to forget.

His heart throbs painfully: to him, at this moment, Lord Ryvendale, rich, courted, the possessor of so many desirable

things, is the man most to be pitied in the three kingdoms. At dinner that evening Gertrude says to him,—

"I hope you will stay till Tuesday, Alsager: I expect Mr. Sartoris and his daughter to dinner to-morrow, and I want some one to play host."

"I don't think I can very well," he answers, but his tone is undecided, for a sudden desire comes across him to see this girl again who has awakened such thoughts in him, and he is not given to denying himself any pleasure that he covets. With a woman's quick perception, Lady Ryvendale sees that he only requires to be pressed, and persists with such pleasant urgency in her entreaty that he allows himself to be persuaded. He has a remorseful thought of Viva, who has implored him to return without fail on the morrow.

"You don't know how miserable I am without you," she has said to him.

"And yet," he reflects, "she does not seem particularly happy when I am with her. How changed she is from what I first knew her! I almost dread to go home now."

When a man's heart reproaches him for a woman's sake, it does not make him love her more, but less.

Alsager is glad that he has decided to stay: he thinks how much pleasanter it will be to dine with a cheery party here than to go to a melancholy tête-à-tête with Viva. She will be vexed and miserable about his staying; he will see that she has been crying when he meets her next day. "Well, I must bear it!" he thinks to himself in an aggrieved way, as though the discomfort and suffering were all his. But he must let her know. He will ride over to W——, ten miles off, early to-morrow morning before the sun gets too hot, and telegraph from there. He orders his horse for nine o'clock next morning. Gertrude conjectures the reason, and asks no questions, but in her heart she feels secretly indignant that he should consider such an attention to "*that woman*" necessary.

Lord Ryvendale has sent his telegram and is on his way back to the Court. It is a broiling morning, but he elects to make a détour of two miles through the village of Helmstone. He is rewarded by seeing a slim, white figure come out from a cottage gate, with a book in one hand and a basket in the other.

Alsager makes haste to come up with her, stops, and dismounts. He cannot but remark how fair and cool she looks, though the sun is blazing down upon her face, only protected by a straw hat, and though she has come out of (probably) a hot, close cottage.

"You out this hot morning, Miss Sartoris?" he says, affecting surprise.

"I like the heat," she answers, smilingly, "and I was obliged to go out. And you are out, and have been a long way too, I should think. How hot your poor horse is!"

"Yes. I assure you I have not been out for pleasure, except" (correcting himself) "that in consequence of my penance this morning I am able to look forward to a great pleasure this evening."

He looks at her meaningly, but she does not seem in the least aware that he intends a compliment to her.

"I see you are fulfilling your mission of ministering angel," he hastens to say, seeing that his last remark has fallen flat.

Now, if there is one thing that ruffles Osyth's gentle composure, it is being accredited with a meritorious act in doing what she considers a simple duty. A faint flush comes into her face as she says,—

"It is so very, *very* little I can do. I think nothing can make one feel more small and humble than visiting the poor, and seeing how much they want, and how utterly unable one is to do anything worth speaking of to help them. I mean," she adds, "a person in my position."

Whilst this little conversation is going on, they are walking through the heart of the village, Lord Ryvendale leading his horse, and Osyth is unpleasantly conscious that many curious eyes are upon them. She was really on her way home, but, wanting to put an end to this tête-à-tête, she stops at a cottage gate, and says,—

"I am going in here, Lord Ryvendale. I must wish you 'good-by.'"

"Till to-night, then," he says, lifting his hat and looking at both her hands, neither of which, however, is at liberty, though she might easily make one so by transferring the book or basket to the other.

Alsager feels a little vexed that she does not. "Ah," reflects his guilty conscience, "she does think badly of you, and

would rather not sully her purity by touching you if she can help it."

Says one gossip to another, straining her eyes after Lord Ryvendale's retreating figure,—

"Well, now, neighbor, what d'ye think o' that?"

"I think they'd make as handsome a couple as ever I set eyes on," rejoins the other. "Lord, now, if Miss Sartoris was to be 'my lady,' it 'ud be a blessed day for all of us, neighbor."

"Yes, so as he got rid o' that wicked furrin woman, and come and settled at the Court as he should do."

For, The Towers being a matter of nine miles distant from Helmstone, Viva is unknown to the inhabitants, except by hearsay. And in any case they would have thought very little of an English lady who could "go and marry a furriner, even if he was a dook, or a prince either."

It is a noteworthy fact that the two old women whose remarks I have just chronicled, although they were regular church-goers and exceedingly strong in spiritual matters, saw nothing at all shocking or unnatural in the idea of joining Lord Ryvendale, whose history they well knew, to an innocent, spotless girl like Osyth, whom they were unanimous in declaring to be "fit to go to heaven straight off." But they were women, and women are all match-makers; women all love a lord, and women invariably throw the blame of men's sins upon the woman, when there happens to be one in the case. And when is there not? Alsager spends the latter part of the afternoon with his sister-in-law, who is, for her, in the highest spirits. She has inserted the thin end of the wedge, she thinks, that is to separate him from sin and Viva, and is proportionately triumphant. She would like to take her Prodigal to call on some of their neighbors, but he rebels against this: so she drives him in her phaeton to see some improvements on his property, and to visit one or two old pensioners whom he has known from his childhood. There is a new occupant at one of the lodges, and Lady Ryvendale makes a point of stopping to introduce Alsager to her, and to bid her tell "my lord" of her husband's exploits in the Crimea, and fetch his medals to exhibit. Alsager goes bravely through this ordeal, which bores him not a little. Women, who delight in these little condescensions, have seldom any idea what

embarrassment they (as a rule) cause men. Gertrude has too much tact to turn the conversation very frequently upon Miss Sartoris, but every now and then she takes occasion to record one of her good actions.

Here they pass the cottage of a blind man to whom Osyth taught the alphabet for the blind, having first learned it herself for the purpose; that sturdy-looking child was brought from the jaws of death by her tender nursing, after nights of watching by its sick-bed; that one-legged old man, in the donkey-cart, has become quite an important person as the village carrier since Miss Sartoris started him in business and bought both cart and donkey out of the proceeds of her own needlework. Somehow, these little stories, that might naturally seem tame and wearisome to a man of the world, find an eager listener in Lord Ryvendale: not a word that tells of Osyth's goodness and charity is lost upon him. Gertrude, with secret delight, sees the effect her narrations produce, and is careful not to overdo the subject.

By her brother-in-law's express desire, Lady Ryvendale has always kept up a certain amount of state at the Court. When Lord Ryvendale visits her, they dine in the large dining-room; the family plate is set forth dazzlingly burnished upon the sideboard, and everything is done in accordance with the traditions of former times, when there was not a more hospitable nor a better-appointed house in the county. Even though Lady Ryvendale has retired very much from the world, this semi-state is agreeable to her from habit. She is an earl's daughter, and has always lived in an atmosphere of luxury.

The dining-room terminates the long suite of apartments that runs from end to end of the house: its vast windows look over the woods and valley,—a glorious view.

The longest day has only gone by a week: the summer evening is at its fairest. Lady Ryvendale has decided that it would be a thousand pities to shut out the air and the glorious sunset: so they are to dine by daylight.

The windows are thrown wide open: the heavens are flooded from end to end with golden light, the birds are still singing, when Lord Ryvendale leads Miss Sartoris in to dinner. As they pass through the two lovely drawing-rooms, whose decoration had been his father's hobby, and into the fine dining-room, Alsager, accustomed as he has been all his life to luxu-

rious surroundings, is smitten with a momentary curiosity whether these things have any value in the eyes of the rector's daughter. He would be disappointed to know that, though she can thoroughly enjoy and admire the agréments of life, there is not in her heart one vestige of ambition or desire to possess them for herself.

Otho Desmond and his newly-arrived friend Mr. Egerton are of the party. The rector takes in Lady Ryvendale, Otho has been told off to her companion, and the young soldier is in charge of Riette, and, to all appearance, exceedingly well pleased with his fate. The young lady is in a very arch, laughing mood, but Mr. Desmond is by no means in his usual form. Charlie is his bosom friend, Riette his quasi-betrothed: he wants at all events one of them, and he has neither. Being, however, a bright good-tempered young fellow, he does not sulk and make himself disagreeable, but his expressive face wears by no means a happy look.

Lord Ryvendale is conscious of a *bien-être* that he has not felt for many a day. He is host in his own house, and he has beside him the woman who at the present moment seems to him the most charming of her sex. She talks to him in her own low, sweet voice, and though she knows nothing of his world, and he even less of hers, the conversation flows smoothly on. He wishes she would eat more, but still it is in keeping with her saintship that she should reject all rich and tempting dishes and eat but little, and that of the plainest kind. As a rule, Alsager is not of those who think a woman ought to live on air (or seem to); it has always pleased him that a fair neighbor at dinner (so she ate gracefully) should be appreciative of dainty fare, and that her eyes should sparkle with more animation after the champagne had been round. But to-night he is quite in another frame of mind: the fair, calm face, the simple habits, the pure and serious expression of the eyes to which coquetries and provocations are unknown, seem to him the greatest charm in a woman. There is no fire in the glance with which he regards her: it is a calm, quiet look of sincere but unmistakable admiration and respect. He feels a wish to be alone with her, as a man always does when he greatly likes a woman, but it is that he may talk quietly and confidentially with her and thereby rest his own tired heart, not that he may have the opportunity of making her aware

of the interest she has inspired in him. Alsager is thinking how he shall separate her from the rest of the party and get her all to himself. He will compass it somehow: he has even decided upon the very spot where they shall sit together in the gardens this glorious night. And the thought of this calm pleasure seems more desirable in his eyes than the excitement of meeting alone a woman whom he passionately loved. A reaction against violent sensations has set in in his heart: a restful calm seems the one great good.

The ladies are not left long to themselves after dinner. Coffee has but just been brought when the rector appears in the doorway, shortly followed by the rest of the party.

"It seems a shame to be in-doors such a night," Lord Ryvendale remarks to his sister-in-law, and she responds at once,—

"It does indeed. You young people must all go out: it will be delightful in the grounds. I am a little afraid of the night air, but I dare say Mr. Sartoris will stay and take care of me."

Two minutes later, Riette is tripping down the broad flight of steps that leads from the upper to the lower terrace, followed by Otho and young Egerton. Osyth and Lord Ryvendale follow at a slower pace.

"Stay," says Alsager, as Miss Sartoris begins to descend the steps: "look at the view from this point first."

He stands leaning against a stone urn filled with vivid geraniums, and, as Osyth looks away over the landscape bathed in moonlight, he—looks at her.

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

### RICH, BUT HOW POOR!

It is passing fair, the scene that lies below them, in the exquisite light and hush of the summer night, the terrace with its parterres of many-hued flowers seen distinctly in the brilliant moonlight, and the gardens, sloping gently away into the valley, on the right the dark masses of woods, and on the

left the Park, dotted with magnificent trees. The fountain is still playing; the musical plash of its water falls sweetly on their ears; yonder runs the same silvery stream that you see from the rectory garden; the cattle are lying drowsily in the meadows. Osyth, leaning with clasped hands on the balustrade, contemplates the scene with the pure enjoyment of a heart at peace with itself.

"Oh, what a lovely world this is!" she says, softly. But the man beside her utters a sigh of bitter, weary discontent. Then he too leans over the balustrade, and looks long and intently before him.

"Tell me," he says, presently, "what effect does a scene like this, a night like this, have upon you?"

She glances for a moment at him in some surprise, but his face is averted.

"It makes me feel intensely happy," she answers; then, in a low, reverent voice, "it makes me feel how unutterably good God is, to have made everything so lovely for our enjoyment."

"Does it?" says Alsager, in a voice that is almost harsh. "It has a very different effect upon me. It makes me feel full of bitter yearnings and regrets. It seems to me as if the appearance of so much peace and beauty was only given to tantalize us,—to make us dream of something fair and lovely, that might be, but is not,—to make the contrast of the warring and strife of our own hearts and lives more poignant, more agonizing to us."

"Oh, no, no!" utters Osyth, earnestly: "that is a wrong thought. That is maligning God; that is turning his blessings into curses."

"It was wrong of me to say it to you," replies Alsager. "How should you, in your pure heart, be able to guess, even in the remotest way, at the feelings of a wretch like I am?"

A strange fancy has come over him. He thirsts to tell her that he is wicked, and a reprobate; he wants to unburden his soul to her; he wants her pity, her sympathy, her interest; he longs to be something better, and it is she whom he would have lead him to straighter, truer paths.

"A wretch like you!" she repeats. "Oh, Lord Ryvendale!" And she raises her earnest eyes to his face. "A man in your position, still young, and with such splendid opportunities before you!"

"Splendid opportunities!" And he laughs a short unmirthful laugh. Then he says, in a quiet voice,—

"I want to talk to you, Miss Sartoris, and" (looking round) "this does not seem a very comfortable or convenient place for conversation. Will you, do you mind coming with me to another part of the garden?"

Osyth hesitates for a moment; then she goes with him silently, her heart full of a gentle wonder. That Lord Ryvendale, who, thirty-six hours ago, was a complete stranger to her, should be bestowing his confidences familiarly upon her to-night,—that this man of the world, of fashion, occupying a position among the great ones of the earth, should be humbling himself before a simple girl,—seems almost incomprehensible to her. As she walks beside him, she is praying with all her soul that it may be given her to speak some word in season to this heart at war with itself.

Lord Ryvendale has carried out his desire; he has brought her to the very spot where he told himself he would bring her; she is sitting just where he intended her to sit, and he is fulfilling his own part of the programme by leaning against the trunk of the tree close beside her. He breaks the silence by a frank avowal of his intention and its success.

"All this afternoon," he tells her, "all dinner-time, I was thinking that to this very spot I would bring you, that I might talk to you quietly and alone. No one will interrupt us here. Is it not strange?" he goes on, musingly: "two nights ago I had never seen you, and now I feel as though you were my nearest, dearest friend,—the one to whom, before all others, nay the *only* one, to whom I could unburden my heart. You think of me as a reprobate and a sinner" (changing his voice and speaking quickly and earnestly): "well, God knows! so I am, but perhaps not so bad as I am painted. What do they say of me? Have they told you my wretched story?"

The moonlight shows him the faint red color that his words bring into her delicate cheek. He had not intended, for one moment, to speak of Viva to her, nor to enter into any details about his life: he merely wanted to tell her, vaguely, that he was restless, unhappy, dissatisfied with himself, and wanting to be better: he had hoped to awaken her sympathy and interest without making any actual confession.

"Let me tell you the real story!" he goes on, vehemently. "No! do not shrink from me! you cannot believe that I would say anything that could offend your purity. And it is part of your mission to heal the disease of souls; and how can you do that, unless you learn what their disease is? You know, of course, that I ran away with the Duchess de Lallière, —though heaven knows what garbled version you may have heard of it; you know that she is still with me. Well, now, I beseech you, hear the truth from my lips, and, as God is my witness, I will tell it you faithfully.

"She was beautiful and fascinating; I was thrown a good deal with her; her husband was a brute, who treated her infamously. I need not enter into that part of it now. One day she discovered something that made it impossible for her to stay another night beneath his roof. She came to me, as the only friend in Paris whom she could trust. Almost immediately the duke discovered the fact, and turned the tables upon her by a foul accusation. We fought, he and I; I was wounded; the duchess would not leave me until I was better; then—God forgive me!—I persuaded her (for by that time she had lost friends, reputation, all) to remain with me. Do you think we are happy? Do I look like a happy man? I give you my word, there are times when I only long for the courage to put a bullet through my brain. And she, poor soul! is, if possible, more unhappy still. Oh, no! be quite sure that there is no pleasure in sin,—that the fruit of it is as ashes in the mouth!"

And then Osyth, who has been listening intently to him, says, in her low, clear voice,—

"Oh, why do you not fly from it, then? If you are—both—unhappy, why do you not begin a fresh life? *You* have so much before you, such a great sphere of influence, and she" (dropping her voice), "if she repent and turn to good works, God will forgive her, and perhaps in time she may find peace."

Even to Osyth, as to all other women, it is the woman who is the chief sinner, the one who must suffer. The man may begin a new career, with life, love, and happiness before him, but the woman must repent forever in sackcloth and ashes.

"If I were to leave her, it would break her heart."

"And yet," urges Osyth, "you say she is unhappy. And

if she cares for you, can she be content to drag you down, to keep you from doing good, from being useful and happy in the world?"

As Alsager listens, it seems to him that it is unfair and unreasonable of Viva, because her life is spoiled, to wish to mar his too. There is a pause. Alsager is the first to break it.

"Four years ago," he says, "I don't think there could have been a happier or more contented fellow on earth than I was. I had no cares. I was devoted to society and sport, never without one or the other, frequently I had both. And I should have thought then that to be master here would make me the most enviable man in Christendom. And now the place is mine, I can have no pleasure out of it. I cannot live here: every time I come, it makes my heart ache to think of what might be, but is not."

"And yet, for your own sake, and for the sake of your people, you ought to be here," says Osyth, earnestly. "Do not you ever think what a responsibility it is to have all these human beings under you? You know nothing of their lives, or of their hardships, their sicknesses, their sorrows, and yet it is to you they all look up as their master. I am speaking very boldly to you: I have no right—I hope you will forgive me." And again the blush rises to her cheek.

"Do speak!" he entreats, earnestly. "It is right that I should hear these things: it may be good for me and them too."

"The lives of the poor are so hard," Osyth continues: "we who live in such luxury and abundance cannot realize the abject want that grinds them down. Now, just to put it simply before you, what would fourteen shillings be to us?"

"Do not say us," says Alsager, softly; "do not put yourself in the same category with me. I have heard of your goodness and charity. Change the phrase, and say, 'What is fourteen shillings to you?' and I will reply to you that fourteen shillings is no more than a penny piece; that to lose fourteen pounds at cards, and fourteen times fourteen pounds on a horse, would not give me one after-thought. And now for the application."

"Could you dine for fourteen shillings?" asks Osyth.

"Certainly I could, if I did not drink champagne; but then I generally do."

"Well," proceeds Osyth, "the highest wages a man can earn here are fourteen shillings a week, and out of that he must pay for twenty-one meals. Most of these men have large families,—some five children, some six, some twelve. When it gets to twelve, some of the children are generally earning something; but I know a family where there are ten under ten years old, and the eldest is a cripple, and the second an idiot. There, you see, are twelve human beings who must have food three times a day for seven days: that is twelve times twenty-one meals out of fourteen shillings,—two hundred and fifty-two, is it not?"

"Good heavens!" says Alsager, looking aghast, "it is too horrible, when you come to think of it."

"But stay," Osyth goes on, eagerly: "that is not nearly all. They must have clothes; they all want boots,—boots are the greatest drag upon the purses of the poor; they must have a fire every day of the year, to boil water for tea, even if they have nothing else to cook. Then there is the rent, and when they are ill they must pay for medicine. And sometimes the man is out of work: sometimes he spends half his earnings at the public house, so there only remains perhaps half the fourteen shillings."

"It is dreadful!" says Alsager, remorsefully.

"I know several poor old couples who live on four and sixpence a week," adds Osyth, determined that for once the rich worldling shall know something about his poor brother. Brother! what a farce to think of the poor laborer being brother to "my lord"!

"But, after all, what is to be done?" asks Lord Ryvendale, returning to a practical view of the case. "If I were to make all the men on my estate comfortably off, there would be nothing left for me but the work-house."

"It is not that," answers Osyth: "you could not afford it, nor could your neighbors; and if the poor were all made comfortably off, they would not work, and the whole community would be pauperized. But there is so much a man in your position could do, Lord Ryvendale, without any *actual giving of money*. If their houses were cheap and comfortable,—if they had clubs started which could be made self-supporting,—if, more than everything, they saw and felt that they were taken an interest in, and not looked upon as mere beasts of

burden,—if there was a village hospital for their sick,—if they could be prevented, by timely measures, from becoming incurably ill and diseased,—their lives and those of their descendants might become very different from what they are now. Forgive me," she concludes, turning upon him eyes illumined by the warmth with which she has advocated her cause, "but I do think, if you could take an interest in such matters as these, you would not have the unhappy, morbid thoughts you suffer from now."

"You are an angel!" cries Alsager, catching her hand and kissing it fervently.

Osyth draws it away, blushing deeply, and rising to her feet.

"Lord Ryvendale!" she utters, with dignity.

"I ask you ten thousand pardons," he says, remorsefully. "I was carried away for the moment. You do not, cannot think I would willingly displease you. Stay!" he entreats, as she is moving away: "one moment longer. I will reflect upon what you have said. I will try to be of more use in the world, and you will help me. You will advise me: you will let me talk to you, will you not?"

"I know so little," she answers, in a subdued voice. "Ask those who are really competent to advise you. If, in my poor way, I can help you to make others happier, to be happier yourself, I will most gladly do all that lies in my power."

"Promise me this," says Alsager, with a certain tremor in his voice: "you will not think worse of me than you can help; you will not shun me, nor shrink from me, nor believe me to be what many people would try to make me seem to you."

Osyth raises her clear, steadfast eyes to his face.

"Why should I judge you, or think evil of you?" she says,—"I who have never been tempted? I am indeed sorry for you, for I think you are not happy. Oh" (lowering her eyes), "if I thought I could persuade you to turn from the life you live now to a better and nobler one, I would pray for it every hour of the day."

He sighs deeply.

"Would not I turn gladly enough," he says to himself, "if honor did not keep me back?"

"Osyth! Osyth!" cries Riette's ringing voice from the terrace.

"Osyth!" is shouted by Otho's powerful lungs.

"We are coming," cries Lord Ryvendale, in answer.

"We thought you were lost!" Riette calls to them from the terrace, as they are half-way up the broad flight of steps. "The carriage has been waiting half an hour."

Osyth, usually so calm and self-possessed, is disconcerted, and knows not what answer to make. Lord Ryvendale seems no less at a loss. As they enter through the drawing-room window, a triumphant little smile crosses Lady Ryvendale's face, but she makes no allusion to their prolonged absence.

When Osyth has been taken to the carriage by Lord Ryvendale, and Riette attended, with great empressement, by her two handsome young swains, and when they are driving away from the door, Riette cries,—

"Come, Osyth, confess! where have you been hiding all this time with 'my lord'? Has he been proposing to you? I felt quite sure, from the way he looked at you all dinner-time, that he was going to. Papa dear, wouldn't it be delightful to have Osyth 'my lady'? We would come and live with her at the Court, wouldn't we? Fancy having such a lovely, splendid, delightful home!"

"Hush, madcap!" utters the rector, gently.

"We shall see," says Riette, nodding sagaciously. "But, Osie dear, *do* tell us where you were, and what Lord Ryvendale said to you. Do you know, you both had quite a guilty look when you came into the drawing-room, and blinked like two owls?"

"We were talking about the poor," answers Osyth, in a grave, quiet voice.

"Oh!" utters Riette, in a disappointed tone: "was that all? I was hoping it was something quite different. He is very nice, is he not, papa? I think him quite handsome: his eyes are beautiful. And he is quite my idea of a lord, though perhaps hardly tall enough. I always fancied lords must be very tall."

"And a duke seven feet high, eh, darling?" smiles the rector.

"No, papa, not at all: a lord and a duke are all the same to me. But Lord Ryvendale has such distinguished manners, has he not? how well he did the honors! and he did not seem at all nervous or afraid of that severe-looking old man in black nor of those immense footmen."

"They were quite big enough for lords, eh?" laughs the rector, teasingly.

"Now, papa, you are not to laugh at me!" cries Riette, putting her hand before his mouth. "I dare say you have known lots of lords, and dukes, and princes, but please to remember, I never spoke to one in my life until yesterday."

"And do you feel much elevated since then?" asks her father, gayly. "I did not remark that you were particularly abashed in his presence."

"Oh, no! that I was not; not in the very least. Instead of being stiffer and prouder, he seemed nicer, and easier to get on with, than most people."

"That is the characteristic of a true gentleman, whatever his rank in life," returns the rector, with emphasis.

"Osie, why are you so silent?" says her chatterbox sister. "Tell us what you think of him. You have seen much more of him than we have. Please to deliver your verdict."

Osyth's heart and soul are so full of Lord Ryvendale that to put what she thinks into a commonplace sentence seems an impossible task. How cold her voice and words seem, even to herself, as she answers,—

"I like him very much."

"Like him very much!" repeats Riette, upbraidingly. "After having all that lovely talk by moonlight with him, is that all you can say? And I, with no opportunities, am more than half in love with him already."

When they reach home, and Osyth has bidden "good-night" to her father and sister, she sits down by her dressing-table and falls into a profound revery. It is something very unusual for her to spend even one of her waking hours with idle hands and far-off thoughts, but these are hours robbed from sleep and fairly hers. And, since they are full of earnest desire for the welfare of a human soul, even her own heart can find nothing to reproach her with. To her, Lord Ryvendale seems no less than a fallen angel; in him she thinks she recognizes a being, once full of noble aspirations, of great capacities for good, but now tempted and fallen, yet ready, willing, waiting to be reclaimed. In the quiet country life she has been accustomed to, she has been thrown little in the society of men: it is small wonder, then, that a man so versed in the arts of pleasing as Lord Ryvendale should make a profound impres-

sion upon her. And he has come to her in the way of all others most calculated to awaken her interest. He has come, not as a man of rank, of fashion, flattering her by open admiration and selecting her to do honor to, but he has come to her as a man weary and world-worn, a man burdened by remorse, by the weight of his sins and the sense of his own unworthiness, and he has succeeded in awakening in her gentle heart an intense pity and sympathy, an eager desire to help to the utmost his longings for a better life. And, alas! poor innocent heart! she knows not that whilst she is desiring to draw his soul heavenward he is drawing hers earthward; that the germ of human love is already in her breast; that the holiness and purity of her life have not made her proof against this man's fascinations, any more than worldly lore could make the veriest woman of fashion.

Lord Ryvendale is no less deep in meditation than the fair girl whom he has so recently left. He is thinking of her. By this time he has almost forgotten his heart-weariness: the simple telling of his story, of his regrets, of his spoiled life to her, has brought with it that relief which always follows the unburdening of a heart long weighted with an unconfessed trouble. He is thinking of Osyth as the woman of all others in the world most suited to his need, the woman who could make his future all that he once dreamed it. How sweet and fair and pure she is! what a heaven she would make his home! how her gentle influence would assert itself almost imperceptibly upon everything and every one around her! what a tender adorable wife she would make (for those soft brown eyes must be capable of loving dearly and truly)! what a perfect mother! There would be no tears, no passionate reproaches, no "renewings of love:" all would be calm and peaceful: life would flow on in a happy channel, without rocks or shoals.

Rest! what other word or thought is so sweet to most men who have reached middle life? sweeter even to the man of pleasure than to him who has borne the burden and heat of the day, for toil begets no weariness like that which the perpetual search after distraction brings.

With a start, Alsager awakes from his dream to grapple with a cold reality. It is impossible that this girl can be anything to him, so long as Viva lives. The initiative of a separation must come from her, not him. If she were to repent,

—if remorse were to prey upon her until she felt that for her soul's sake she must leave him,—why, then he would not seek to combat her scruples; he would admit that for both their sakes it would be well to give up this life. He would make the handsomest provision for her and for their child: everything that a man of honor should do, he would most rigorously fulfil.

A mocking memory comes to him of the vows he once made to her: he remembers the pictures he painted of their life together in the future, when his love should compensate her for all other pangs,—how he swore to be faithful to her unto death.

"Pshaw!" he mutters, impatiently; "that is what men always say under such circumstances, and one means it at the time. My life is sacrificed to her," he thinks, bitterly, "and yet it does not make her happy: we are both most wretched."

The old miserable feeling creeps back to him. A veil of mist spreads itself across the bright picture that half an hour before made his heart beat high.

"Could you not come again next Saturday?" Lady Ryvendale asks him at breakfast in the morning. "It is so delightful to have the head of the house here: the Court seems quite another place, does it not?" she asks, appealing to Miss Scott, her companion.

"It does indeed," Miss Scott replies.

"You are both very kind to say so," Lord Ryvendale answers. "I assure you it is a very great pleasure to me to come, and I only wish I could make my visits more frequent."

"Make an effort to come next Saturday, Alsager," urges Gertrude.

"Impossible, my dear, I regret to say."

"Well, then, the following Saturday. Come! let me extract a promise from you, and then I shall be quite happy."

"I am afraid I shall not be able to return for some weeks," says Lord Ryvendale, who has come to the conclusion that it is folly to make himself more wretched and unsettled than he already is, by seeing and dwelling upon Osyth's perfections.

Lady Ryvendale looks genuinely disappointed.

"I suppose you find us too dull," she says.

At this juncture Miss Scott discreetly leaves the room.

"I have been happier during this visit than I have been for

an age," replies Alsager. "That is the greatest reason I have for staying away."

"Oh, Alsager! why do you have such perverse ideas?" cries Lady Ryvendale. "If God sends you a chance of happiness, a chance of turning away from the error of your past life, why do you not take it thankfully, instead of holding back from some wrong, misguided notion about honor? What consideration can be due to a woman who must have been lost to all sense of honor and duty before she could descend to her present position?"

"Hush!" says Lord Ryvendale. "It is I who am to blame, far more than she."

"Of course a generous-minded man is bound to say that," retorts Gertrude. "Oh, I am more than disappointed! I thought Osyth had made some impression upon you, I began to feel as if my hopes and prayers for you were going to be realized; I was ready and glad to sacrifice everything for your future welfare; I——" but tears check her further utterance.

Alsager rises from his chair, and, going to her, takes her hand affectionately.

"You are very good and unselfish, Gertrude," he says, in a low voice, "and I am grateful to you. But now tell me, suppose even that I were free, how could I for an instant dare to think that a girl like Miss Sartoris could bring herself to feel anything approaching regard or esteem for me?"

Lady Ryvendale looks at him in surprise. With the peculiar views of her sex, she is unable to see the least incongruity in a man of her brother-in-law's position, whatever his past life (so that he has forsaken it), marrying the greatest saint in Britain. She would be apt to think it an impertinence on the part of any young woman to raise his previous shortcomings as an obstacle.

"Why not," she says, "if you repent and forsake your past life?"

"I am quite unworthy of her," answers Alsager, with no feigned humility.

Gertrude gives an imperceptible toss to her head.

"Men are different from women. They have so many temptations," she says,—"particularly in our rank of life."

"Don't you think that is a very poor, selfish excuse, Gertrude?" utters Lord Ryvendale, wondering, not for the first

time in his life, at the readiness with which women fall into the views that are most convenient to the other sex. "We proudly imagine ourselves your superiors, and yet we are permitted to be weak where you are bound to be strong. You are so lenient to us, so hard to yourselves."

"It is necessary," Gertrude answers. "Society must be severe to women, and indulgent to men, however much it may deplore the necessity for both. How could it exist if women were permitted the freedom that men enjoy, or if men were ostracized whose lives did not bear the same inspection as ours?"

"How indeed?" echoes Lord Ryvendale, unable to repress a smile at this feminine logic.

---

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A COQUETTE.

CHARLIE EGERTON and Otho are discussing breakfast at Helmstone Park the morning after the dinner at the Court. They have the vigorous appetites and the healthy well-washed appearance of the ordinary young Briton of the better class, and they are at an age when personal adornment is by no means an *arrière-pensée*, but a very important and cherished consideration.

Though there is no particular affectation of dandyism about them, the cut of their shooting-coats, their striped shirts of astounding stiffness and glossiness, their patent-leather shoes, the thick gold rings on their fingers, all show that the fair sex are not alone in the belief that personal charms may be enhanced by adornment.

"Jolly evening, last night!" says Charlie, having mitigated the first pangs of hunger. "I shouldn't mind having Ryvendale Court and twenty thousand a year. I suppose Ryvendale has as much."

"All that."

"He seems a very good fellow, and the drink was undeni-

able. What a deuce of a hurry he was in to get away from it, though! Is there anything between him and Miss Sartoris?"

"No, I should hope not," answers Otho, curtly.

"Why?" asks Charlie, looking up from his egg in some surprise.

"Because she is an angel, and he isn't worthy of her. He doesn't enjoy the best reputation in the world, you know."

"Ah! ran away with somebody's wife, didn't he? That sort of thing is rather coming in. I suppose he's left her before this, and reformed rakes are supposed to make the best husbands. Thundering good match for her, I should say!"

"If she were *my* sister, he shouldn't have her, I know," answers Otho, with emphasis.

"Jealous, eh, old fellow? What! are *you* sweet in that quarter? I thought it was the other."

"I am devoted to them both," says Otho, rather loftily.

"'How happy could I be with either!'" laughs Charlie. "Well, now, Miss Sartoris looks too good for me; but the little one's a darling. What's her outlandish name?"

"Riette," reponds Otho, a trifle sulkily.

"How do you spell it, and how do you pronounce it?"

"Like the last two syllables of Henriette."

"Oh! And what is the origin of it?"

"A rich and eccentric lady insisted on being her godmother, and stipulated that she was to be called Harriet after her. But as Mrs. Sartoris did not like the name, she changed it into Riette, which *I* think very pretty."

"So do I. Well, and did the rich and eccentric old party leave her all her money?"

"No! After having promised and vowed three things in her name, first to endow her with all her worldly goods——"

"Hold on, Otho! You're mixing up two ceremonies."

"Well, to make my story short, the old fool married a foreign count, who turned out to be a courier and played ducks and drakes with the old girl's money; so all poor Riette got was a church service and a set of silver tea-caddies."

"What an infernal shame! She's awfully pretty and nice, little Riette, and will be an addition to the pleasures of my visit that I was far from expecting."

Otho colors a little, and plays with his teaspoon. After a slight pause he blurts out,—

"I may as well warn you, old fellow, that she and I are as good as engaged, and therefore I'm afraid I must ask you to turn your attentions to another quarter."

"Stuff and humbug!" laughs Charlie. "I took the opportunity of sounding her last night on the subject, and she assured me that she looked upon you exactly as a brother."

"Oh, did she?" says Otho, looking rather savage.

"Besides, you said just now you were devoted to them both. Don't be a dog in the manger, Otho: you bestow your attentions upon the sister, and leave Miss Riette to me."

As Charlie is his bosom friend and he is delighted to have him as a guest, Otho has not the slightest intention of quarrelling with him, either about Riette or anything else: so they presently betake themselves amicably to the stables with their cigars, and for an hour, at least, the fair have no place in their thoughts.

Otho had resolved that he would not go to the rectory today; but about noon, finding the time begin to hang a little, he suggests that they shall stroll down and look up the rector. Charlie assents with alacrity.

"Couldn't we get up a picnic or something?" he suggests, and Otho promises to make an effort. When they arrive, the rector is in the justice-room, Osyth is out on some charitable mission, and Riette is engaged on a French exercise under the cedar. She springs up with a cry of pleasure as the two young men make their way across the lawn to her.

"How delightful!" she cries, flinging away her book. "How kind of you to come!"

She looks at Charlie as she makes this remark.

"We are indeed fortunate to gain credit for doing what is most charming to ourselves," returns Mr. Egerton, in his best manner.

"Come, Charlie!" interposes Otho; "Miss Sartoris is not accustomed to these high-flown compliments."

"But Miss Sartoris will be delighted to become accustomed to them, if the opportunity offers," answers Riette, with a glance of arch impertinence at Otho. "So pray, Mr. Egerton" (turning to Charlie), "continue in the same strain. I like it; and we never take any notice of what this boy says."

This is a pretty state of things for Otho, who has always been treated as a sort of young prince at the rectory, and

adored as such by Osyth and Riette. "This boy," forsooth! It is a very fine thing to be a prince,—until a greater than he comes along. Charlie's strength is in his novelty, for his expectations are incomparably smaller than Otho's; but Riette has not been brought up to distinguish the gradations of worldly prosperity.

"Was it not delightful last night?" she says, still addressing Charlie. "I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. Oh, how I wish it could all come over again to-night!"

"So do I," agrees Charlie.

"Well, really, it did not strike me as being so very exciting," chimes in Otho, who feels a most unwonted inclination to disagree with everybody.

"Oh, yes, it was, wildly exciting: wasn't it?" Riette appeals to his friend.

"I thought it delightful," he responds.

"I came to propose a picnic," remarks Otho; "but I suppose you would consider that too slow, after the *wild excitement* of last night."

"A picnic!" (clapping her hands): "that would be too delicious! Have you seen papa? Oh, dear Otho! do go and ask him at once!"

Otho is pleased by this term of endearment: at the same time, he does not feel particularly disposed to go and leave her tête-à-tête with his friend.

"Why shouldn't we all go?" he says.

"No, no: he will do anything for you, and Mr. Egerton and I will stop here in the shade."

So Otho goes, though not altogether willingly nor beamingly.

"Now, Miss Sartoris," says Charlie, as soon as his friend's back is turned, "I must protest against the formality of being called Mr. Egerton. I don't know myself by that name: every one calls me Charlie."

"I should like to," answers Riette, with great frankness. "Charlie is such a pretty name, and, you know, I always call you Charlie behind your back. Perhaps I had better ask Osyth first. And, you know, it's simply ridiculous for you to call me Miss Sartoris: it is the first time in my life that any one ever did such a thing."

"Well, may it be Miss Riette?"

"I should rather have it Riette, without the Miss," she says,

reflectively; "but I will ask Osyth that too. Come and have some strawberries: we have the loveliest ones you ever saw,—much finer than those at dessert last night."

When Otho returns to look for them, five minutes later, he is not altogether pleased to find that they have disappeared. Instinct, however, leads him to the kitchen-garden, where he discovers, with an emotion not entirely pleasurable, Riette in the act of pressing a magnificent strawberry upon Charlie, which he is modestly demurring to accept.

"Well, Otho," she cries, "what does papa say? Stop a moment. *Do* you think that we" (indicating Charlie by a nod of the head) "might call each other by our Christian names?"

"Really" (with some stiffness), "I'm afraid I am no judge. I believe it is not *usual*, upon so very recent an acquaintance."

"What an old humbug you are, Otho," retorts his friend. "Why, from hearing you talk of Miss Riette and her sister, I feel as if I had known them all my life. But how about the picnic?"

"Mr. Sartoris thinks we had better wait until the afternoon, when it will be cooler, and drive to the abbey, boil our kettle, and have tea, and be back in time for eight o'clock dinner with Sir George. After all, I don't think it would be fair to leave him again to-night, though he would be sure to wish us to go."

"Oh, yes; papa is always right, and it will be such fun to boil our own kettle," cries Riette. "And how are we to go?"

"I will bring the break at four, and the kettle too. I will talk to Mrs. Fox, and she will see that we have everything to sustain life. It is to be my entertainment to-day. Come, Charlie, we must make a start, if we are to be home by lunch-time."

"I will walk to the gate with you," says Riette, preparing to accompany them.

"Good-by, Otho. Good-by, *Mr.* Charlie," she says, when they arrive there, giving her hand to the latter only.

She has taken off her hat, and is standing bareheaded, leaning on the gate. Phœbus is kissing her cream-white skin with ardent, burning kisses, and Charlie, who has been wont to see young ladies more careful of their complexion, says,—

"Pray put on your hat: the sun will burn you up."

"I wish it would!" exclaims Riette. "I long to be brown

and sunburnt, but all I can do is no use. It is so stupid to have a white face all through the summer. Nothing will make Osyth and me brown or freckled."

"Come, Riette, don't be silly," says Otho, with a little air of authority quite new to him: "if you don't get sunburnt you will get sunstroke." And with that he takes the hat from her hand and puts it on her head.

"Thank you, sir," she says, dropping him a mocking little curtsey. "I wonder it never occurred to you before, all the thousands of times you have seen me out in the sun without a hat. If Mr. Charlie had not mentioned it, you would never have thought of it now, you know. Good-by." And she trips off, whilst the two young men, arm in arm, pursue the opposite direction.

During lunch, Riette takes the opportunity of consulting her father and sister upon what she and Mr. Egerton are to call each other. They both smile at the idea of its being Miss Sartoris and Mr. Egerton, but both are equally against their lasping at once into the familiarity of Christian names.

"Then, papa," says Riette, "what is it to be?"

"Well, darling," suggests the rector, after some thought, "when you speak *to* each other, there is no occasion for the mention of a name at all, and when you speak *of* each other, all I can see for it is the prefix of Mr. and Miss to your Christian names. But he seems a very nice, gentlemanlike young fellow, and I dare say, after a little time, etiquette will be an unnecessary consideration."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaims Riette; "I shall be very glad when that time comes. I long to call him Charlie."

Nether father nor sister can resist a smile at the child's naïveté.

Punctually at half-past four Sir George Desmond's handsome horses are pawing up the trimly-kept gravel in front of the rectory porch. Three minutes later they are off in the direction of the abbey. Otho, doing charioteer, with the groom beside him, is not at all sure that he is having the best of it when he hears Riette's ringing laughter and his friend's gay tones behind him, and turns, now and then, to ask what the joke is.

"It is nothing about you," responds Riette. "Mind your horses, or you will be upsetting us."

Otho puts the unreluctant bays along, feeling his lofty position somewhat isolated, and in forty minutes they have accomplished the seven miles to the abbey, considerably to the groom's disgust, as he regards the lather on their sides.

"Sharp work that, eh, my boy?" says the rector, looking dubiously from the horses to Otho as he dismounts: "on a midsummer day too."

"Oh, it will do them good for once," replies young Jehu, cheerily. "Walk them up to the farm, Tom, and be here again at half-past six."

"Very good, sir." And Tom takes the reins, touches his hat, and drives off, wishing to himself that Mr. Otho had the job of cleaning them down.

Tea is to be the first consideration, and the two young men and Riette go in search of sticks for the kettle, whilst the rector and Osyth unpack the delicacies. Mrs. Fox, the housekeeper at Helmstone Park, is a fine, buxom woman: her heart is as large as her person, and she has unlimited ideas as to the digestions and capacities of young people for good things. So, albeit the young men have lunched sumptuously at two, and are to dine more sumptuously at eight, she has provided as much for this auxiliary meal as though neither had any memory of lunch or expectation of dinner. The rector and Osyth, who are aware of her hospitable proclivities, fairly laugh when they take out one dish after another,—galantine, tongue, a Périgord pie, pâté de foie gras, potted salmon, sardines, a pine, a cake, biscuits, a basket of peaches, countless strawberries, hothouse grapes, etc.

"It is absurd," says the rector.

"Never mind," smiles Osyth. "We will lay them all out."

Charlie and Riette, on their return, utter sundry Oh's at the display, but Otho, as host, thinks Mrs. Fox has done the proper thing.

After all, ample justice is done to the good things. The tea, it is true, is a trifle smoky, and has rather a peculiar flavor, but the *al fresco* meal is none the less delightful for that.

Otho, whilst picking up sticks, has been seized with an inspiration. He will devote himself entirely to Osyth, with the view of making Riette jealous. He has always, until now, found the society of one sister as charming as that of the

other. He has never been able to make up his mind that he had the slightest preference for one above the other; but there is no doubt now that he is considerably vexed at the pleasure his friend and Riette seem to take in each other's company. But, as he is a very nice-minded, good-tempered young fellow, and far less spoiled than most young men with such fine prospects would be, he is determined not to be sulky and disagreeable, though he feels a sore inclination that way. So he begins to be assiduously attentive and affectionate to Osyth, and she, quite conscious of what is going on within him, and secretly pleased at it (for in her heart she has always destined him for Riette), does her utmost to soothe his ruffled feelings and to promote general good feeling among the party. But Miss Riette is unfolding proclivities unguessed at in her before. She is flirting unmistakably with Charlie, though in a childish and kittenish-like manner, that one has been amused to notice sometimes in a young lady of seven.

Although Otho seats himself beside Osyth and devotes himself assiduously to her, his eyes will wander towards Riette, who, by the way, seems to have forgotten his existence, and he is burning to join in her conversation with his friend. When tea is over, the rector, who is a bit of an antiquarian, goes off to make researches, Otho remains to help Osyth wash up the tea-things, and Charlie and Riette stroll off on their own account. There is no doubt that they are immensely taken with each other. Charlie, who is accustomed to meet seasoned flirts in garrison towns, finds something so deliciously simple and natural in this pretty young girl that he is entirely taken captive by her, and Riette, to whom it is quite a new sensation to have so gallant and admiring a cavalier, enjoys the novelty of the situation amazingly. Otho watches the disappearance of the pair with something very like a frown.

"Riette seems to be developing a fine talent for flirting," he remarks, with some bitterness, to her sister.

"My dear boy," answers gentle Osyth, "do not use such a word in connection with our darling. She is a child, high-spirited, and fond of pleasure: of course it is delightful to her to be made much of and treated as if she were a woman."

"It is all very well," says Otho, "but Charlie is at this sort of game every day of his life, and if Riette doesn't look out she will be burning her fingers. Besides, Charlie is a third

son, and has nothing but his pay and what his father allows him."

"I do not think that will matter to Riette," smiles Osyth. "My dear Otho, how can you be so absurd? She is a perfect child: do you suppose she is likely for a moment to have any idea beyond the amusement of the moment?"

"I don't know," remarks Otho, discontentedly: "a child becomes a woman the moment she sees a man who takes her fancy. And she never behaved to me as she is doing to Charlie this afternoon."

"But," urges Osyth, "when did you ever make the pretty speeches or pay the attention to Riette that Mr. Egerton is doing?"

"Well, I don't like it," returns Otho, not able to reply to Osyth's last remark. "I have always looked upon her as my property: indeed, I consider we are as good as engaged."

"And how about me?" says Osyth, smiling. "What of all your vows and protestations to me?"

"Oh," cries Otho, looking up quickly, "you know you would not have me. If I thought there was the least chance of it, I would never give a second thought to Riette or any one else."

He stretches out his hand to her, and she gives it a gentle, sisterly pressure.

"No," she answers: "I shall never marry."

There is a pause. Presently Otho, looking keenly at her, says,—

"What about Ryvendale? I should like awfully to see you Lady Ryvendale, but he isn't worthy of you. I suppose you know" (hesitating), "of course you have heard about him and the duchess."

Osyth's whole face and neck become suffused with blushes; her hand trembles visibly.

"Please, Otho, *never* say anything about Lord Ryvendale in connection with me again. I am very sorry for him; he is unhappy, as indeed he must be; I wish I could do something to help him: that" (with unaccustomed energy) "is the only feeling I can ever have towards him."

"But," persists Otho, "if he fell in love with you,—if he gave you the chance of reclaiming him: what then, Osyth?"

"Why speak of things that are utterly impossible?" Osyth

answers, quickly, but with downcast eyes. "I have no feeling for Lord Ryvendale but sorrow that a life which might have been such a noble one should be so wasted."

And she thinks honestly that she is speaking the truth and the whole truth.

"He is only thirty-five,—just in his prime," says Otho; but Osyth is busying herself with packing cups and saucers, and makes him no answer.

Meantime, young Egerton and Riette are enjoying a delightful ramble. He is taking immense care of her, protecting her from brambles, picking wild roses for her, opening gates for her, and paying her a thousand little attentions to which she is utterly unaccustomed and which are therefore all the more delightful to her. After a protracted ramble, they return to the ruins. Riette catches sight of a flower growing upon what seems an inaccessible part of the crumbling brickwork.

"How provoking of it to be up there!" she says. "Why could not it grow within reach?"

"Would you like it?" And in a moment Charlie, who is as lithe and active as a cat, is half way up the ruin, whilst Riette at the foot is entreating him to come down, vowing that she does not care a bit for the flower, and that he will break his neck.

At this moment Otho makes his appearance upon the scene. He grasps the situation at a glance, and his mind is filled with indignation. Whether it is on account of his friend's risk, or the addition of this last feather to the afternoon's discontent, I know not. He goes close up to Riette, who is standing with clasped hands and anxious eyes, and says, with a flushed face, and a certain amount of passion in his voice,—

"Riette, you are a thorough coquette!"

Now, when he utters this word, his interpretation of it is very far from being that given to it by Disraeli in "Coningsby," nor is it uttered in a tone intended to convey the smallest iota of flattery.

"Ah, she is a coquette! a charming character at all times. . . . A coquette is a being who wishes to please. Amiable being! Alas! coquettes are but too rare."

That is what Disraeli writes; but Otho would have said, "A coquette is the most odious character in the world" (when she is coquetting with some one else, *sous entendu*).

At this moment Charlie slips, Riette gives a little scream, Otho rushes to pick up the pieces. Charlie, however, regains his footing, grasps the flower, and a minute later is presenting it impressively to Riette. Her eyes are full of tears, caused by her recent alarm.

"Oh, why did you do it?" she says, reproachfully.

He replies with an eloquent glance.

Taking it all together, this is rather more than he or any other man can stand, Otho thinks. Has he not always adored Riette? has he not been her devoted slave and worshipper from his youth up? is she to be wrested from him now, and by the hand of his own familiar friend,—or, rather, the viper he has warmed in his bosom?

---

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### "O, BEWARE, MY LORD, OF JEALOUSY!"

Two or three days of this sort of thing take Otho completely out of his usual happy frame of mind: he begins to lose the bright, debonair look which has always been the chief characteristic of his face, and is almost gloomy. Sir George remarks the alteration, and says, affectionately,—

"What ails you, my dear fellow? you are losing your color. I hope Egerton is not inciting you to smoke too much?"

"Oh, no, sir: I'm all right," answers Otho, assuming a cheerful tone.

He tries to get up excursions without the party from the rectory; he takes Charlie to visit certain of the county magnates who possess daughters and who have returned early from town. But these ladies have no attraction for the young soldier, who has a decided will and opinion of his own.

"Not to be named in the same day with your sweet little friend at the rectory!" he says, in answer to Otho's eulogistic comments. "Come, old fellow, it's no use your trying to palm them off on me: you know where my heart is."

"Upon my soul," cries poor Otho, with righteous indignation,

"I don't know whether you think it's the action of a friend and a gentleman to steal away the affections of the girl one's fond of under one's very nose!"

"Stuff and humbug!" retorts Charlie. "Have you not written to me every week for the last two years? and haven't you assured me, over and over again, that you had not a secret in the world from me? did you not write me reams twelve months ago, when you were in love with little Colinette, and so precious near making a fool of yourself by marrying her, and is it likely that if you had been engaged to Ri—— to this girl, or even in love with her, you would never have mentioned her to me, except in the most casual way? It's nothing in the world but a selfish, jealous feeling, because you see we've taken such a tremendous fancy to each other."

"Oh!" groans Otho.

"She told me, yesterday, that only last Sunday you said you'd give her up, like a shot, if you thought her sister would have you. It's not likely any girl of spirit is going to stand that."

"And pray," cries Otho, "how could I have talked about giving her up, if there hadn't been something between us?"

"Well, now, I'm just going to put you to the proof. Will you answer me two or three questions?"

"As many as you like."

"Have you ever spoken to her father about wanting to marry her?"

"No. Why, she's only just seventeen."

"Did you ever hint at such a thing in his presence?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did you ever kiss her?'

"No" (fiercely).

"Nor try to?"

"Of course not. I hope I'm too much of a gentleman."

"Well, then, when you proposed, and she accepted you, how was that solemn engagement ratified? I always thought it was done by *oscular* demonstration."

"I did not say that I ever formally proposed to her."

"Then how the deuce, my dear fellow, can you be engaged to her?"

"I suppose you can comprehend that there may be a tacit understanding between two people."

"Oh, yes, perfectly. Well, how long has this 'tacit understanding' existed?"

"For years," returns Otho, superbly.

"Oh! all the time the Colinette affair was going on?"

"Hang Colinette! and you too!" cries Otho, in a rage. "Well, if I tell you now, as my friend, that I love Riette, that I have set my heart upon marrying her, I suppose you have sufficient friendship for me, and sufficient gentlemanlike feeling, to take your attentions elsewhere."

"But suppose she tells me that she likes my attentions, and doesn't want me to take them elsewhere? suppose she tells me that she simply regards you as a brother? what then?"

Otho grinds his teeth.

"Then she's a false, heartless little flirt, and I only hope you'll find her out."

Charlie laughs.

"Well, I'm going down to the rectory now, and I only hope I shall find her in."

"Then you persist in going, after all I have said to you?"

"My dear old fellow, I shall be gone in ten days more, and then you'll have the field all to yourself."

"And do you think I am going to take your leavings, or anybody else's?" cries Otho.

"Perhaps you won't have the chance," answers Charlie, provokingly.

"I never thought that you, my oldest chum, would behave like this," utters Otho, subsiding from anger into melancholy; "but that is always the way, of course, as soon as there is a woman in the case. No friendship can stand that."

"I'll lay you five to two that our friendship is as good this day five years as it is to-day," says Charlie, cheerfully.

"I don't know that that would be saying much for it," replies Otho, in an aggrieved tone.

"Well, then, as it was a week ago. Come, book the bet."

"I don't care to bet on a certainty," answers Otho, stiffly. "No man can feel the same friendship for another who has robbed or tried to rob him of all he values in the world."

Charlie gives vent to a loud, unfeeling laugh.

"Well, I'm off! Will you come with me?"

"No," says Otho.

"Nonsense! Come along!" And Otho, feeling that his

presence will prevent any actual love-making between the pair, accompanies his friend, though with feigned reluctance.

They find Riette alone under the cedar, apparently absorbed in reading. She sees them from afar off, and returns to her book with redoubled interest.

"Oh, is it you?" she says, innocently, when they come close up.

Otho observes that she is dressed with unusual care; it provokes him to see how pretty she looks: he could knock Charlie down, because he has the same privilege as himself of contemplating a tiny little foot in a bronze shoe and an open-worked stocking. Until this moment he had never been aware that Riette had a foot, except from the fact that she walked about like other people.

"Well, and what have you been doing?" she asks, in a patronizing little way, looking from one to the other.

"We have been calling on the Courtlands," replies Otho. "Alice has grown wonderfully pretty."

"Has she? How nice! And did she enjoy being in London? and did she tell you all about being presented? and was she dreadfully frightened?"

"I don't think she opened her lips all the time, except to say yes and no," remarks Mr. Egerton. "And, I must say, *I* didn't see the beauty you speak of, Otho."

"Tastes differ. I think her sweetly pretty."

"What a fickle boy you are!" exclaims Riette. "When I kept telling you, last winter, that Alice was nice and pretty, you used to hold up your hands and say beauty must indeed be 'in the eye of the beholder.'"

"She is immensely improved since then; quite a different girl, in fact."

"How did you manage to tear him away?" says Riette archly to Charlie.

"I can give you the exact substance of their conversation," observes Charlie, maliciously. "Otho asked her if she liked London, and she said, 'Oh, yes!' Better than the country? 'Oh, no!' Did she go to many balls? 'Oh, yes!' And the opera? 'Oh, yes!' Was she sorry to come home? 'Oh, no!' Did she not think it would be very dull here after so much gayety? She did not know. Did she think they could manage to get up some picnics, or something? She did not know."

"Really," remarks Otho, "I am sorry you had nothing better to do than to listen to our conversation."

"So was I. But there was another fellow talking to the other girl, and some old buffer conversing with the mamma, so I was left out in the cold, and most intensely thankful I felt when you gave up Miss Alice as a bad job and made a sign to me to depart."

"Well," inquires Riette, "and when you left them what did you do?"

"Why, as Satan always

'finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do,'

Otho tried to pick a quarrel with me. Not that his hands were idle, for he had all his work cut out to hold in that black horse."

"What did he want to quarrel with you about?" asks Riette, inquisitively.

Otho colors, and darts a threatening glance at his friend.

"Do tell me!" urges Riette, her curiosity stimulated by this bit of by-play.

"About you," answers Charlie, laughing, and throwing a deprecatory glance at Otho, which, however, is not well received.

"How delightful!" cries Riette. "Go on! *Please* tell me all about it!"

"May I, Otho?" asks Charlie.

"If you please," he returns, with a glance that says, plainly, "If you do, your life is not worth ten minutes' purchase."

But Charlie is in a wicked, teasing humor, and takes no notice of the ireful glance.

"He threatened me with the loss of his friendship if I continue to find your society delightful."

"Oh!" says Riette, pursing up her pretty little mouth.

"And he said," continues Charlie, proceeding to embellish his recital with a little fiction, "that if I had a spark of gentleman-like feeling I should take the first train to-morrow, and put myself a hundred miles beyond the reach of temptation."

"Otho," cries Riette, taking this all *au grand sérieux*, and looking at him with sparkling eyes, "if Charlie goes, I shall positively *hate* you! I won't speak to you for a month."

This is too much for Otho. He takes off his hat to her with a grand air, and, turning, walks away with a lofty mien and a stiffened back.

"Oh, come, Otho!" cries Charlie, springing after him; "don't turn rusty at a joke. I was only laughing, you know."

But Otho twists away his arm with a gesture of unmistakable anger, and Charlie stands, looking rather unhappy, and glancing uneasily from Riette to Otho's retreating figure. The former possessing the greater magnetic power, he slowly returns to her side on the rustic bench.

"I'm afraid I've got rather more of a rise out of him than I intended," he says, in a remorseful tone.

"Wasn't it true, then?" Riette asks.

"Well, not the last part of it."

Riette is rather disappointed.

"You should not tell stories," she says, with a virtuous little air. "It is very wrong indeed."

"I think I had better go after him," remarks Charlie, looking wistfully after his friend's diminishing figure.

"No," says Riette, with decision. "I don't think that is at all necessary. Besides, if it was not true, why need he mind?"

"He is jealous, I suppose" replies Charlie. "Jealousy, now" (with a meritorious air) "is a feeling that I can't understand in the least."

(Oh, Charlie! do you forget how you raged and sulked for three whole days, when that pretty girl at the refreshment-rooms transferred her attentions from you to young Ingotsby!)

"Besides," adds Mr. Egerton, "it is not as though you were engaged to him."

"No," returns Riette, grandly; "and if I were, I should consider myself perfectly at liberty to talk to any one else who amused me."

"I should be dreadfully sorry if you were engaged to him," utters Charlie, with a sentimental air, eying the little maiden's numerous charms, and feeling that it would take but very little more to make him head over ears in love with her.

"Should you?" asks Riette, coquettishly.

She is enjoying intensely the new sensation of having some one to make pretty speeches to her, and, in her innocent way, gives the young man plenty of encouragement.

"Of course I should; though he is my best friend, and I would rather that it were he than any one else."

"I am very fond of Otho," the girl tells him, confidentially, "but he is not lover-like enough. He never pays me nice compliments like you do."

"They are not compliments," avers Charlie: "they are truths."

"Nice truths, then," laughs Riette. "But people say truth is never pleasant."

"It must be, in your case," murmurs Charlie, getting more and more sentimental.

Riette laughs gleefully.

"That is the way I like to be talked to; but Otho never talks in that manner. And then it does not occur to him to pay one little attentions, like you did the other day, you know, when you might have killed yourself, falling off the ruin in getting me that flower. I have got it flattened in a book."

"Happy flower!" murmurs Charlie, who might perhaps have been at a loss to give a definition of the beatitude of being flattened in a book.

"Now, do you know," proceeds Riette, "when we were out the other day, Otho and I, we came to some lovely forget-me-nots, and I wanted them. Well, he just stooped to try to pick them, but, as he couldn't reach them, he got up and was going calmly off."

"No!" cries Charlie, apparently horrified at such a want of gallantry on his friend's part.

"Yes, really," asseverates Riette. "I told him it was not nice of him, and then he jumped down and picked them, but he got his boots muddy, and was not at all pleased about it."

"I should have given Otho credit for better taste," says Charlie, not sorry that his own conduct should contrast so favorably with his friend's.

"Still, we are very fond of him," rejoins Riette, rather penitent at having implied a want of chivalry in Otho: "in our hearts we think there is no one like him."

"Oh, he's a very good fellow,—a thundering good fellow!" responds Charlie, trying by adverb and adjective to supply the warmth he feels to be lacking from his tone.

During dinner the same evening there is a decided coolness

between Orestes and Pylades. Sir George remarks painfully the absence of their usual cheery banter: both address their conversation almost exclusively to him. After questioning them as to their day's occupation, he comes to a conclusion very near the truth as to the reason of the disturbance of their friendship. He smiles, and says to himself, "'Who is she?' I need hardly ask. It is, no doubt, my pretty little friend Riette who has thrown the apple of discord upon the board." After dinner he remains for some time with the young men, trying to restore their wonted good fellowship; but his efforts are far from being crowned with success. Both are more deferential, more kindly solicitous about his comfort, than ever, but they are not to be drawn into their habitual relations to each other. Otho is dreadfully aggrieved with Charlie, and Charlie, not being quite sure that he has done the right thing by his friend, is very angry with him in consequence. Sir George goes to bed at ten, and the young men repair, as usual, to the smoking-room. Now there is no alternative but to talk to each other, or to remain silent and so admit that they have quarrelled. Neither wishes to resort to so extreme a measure. A few, frigid remarks are made, a few, frigid responses uttered. At last Charlie, who is hasty of temper, as his dark eyes denote, pitches his cigar into the grate, jumps to his feet, and cries,—

"Hang it! I didn't come here for this sort of thing! As you don't seem to relish my company, the best thing for me will be to do in earnest what I said in joke this afternoon,—to hook it. Perhaps you'll be good enough to order the dog-cart for me, and I'll be off the first thing in the morning."

Otho is divided between two feelings,—indignation against his friend, and the consciousness that he is not behaving hospitably in sulking with him.

"I don't know why you should want to pick a quarrel with me," he answers, in a tone half injured, half conciliatory: "you can hardly imagine I should feel very much pleased, after what you did and said this afternoon. I've loved Riette all my life; you haven't known her a week, and you are trying to set her against me."

"Rot!" utters Charlie, contemptuously. And with this significant but inelegant rejoinder he flings himself back into his chair.

"It is *not* rot," snorts Otho: "it is gospel truth."

"Very well," retorts Charlie: "then, as I said before, the best thing I can do is to go."

"Why on earth," asks Otho, ignoring this remark, "should you let her know that we had been having words about her, and make her feel herself of so much importance? There'll be no holding her now."

"I think it's high time," says Charlie, "that such a lovely girl should have some idea of her own value, and that you should be stopped playing the Sultan, and holding out the sceptre, or not holding it out to her, just as the fit takes you."

"Oh," cries Otho, wrathfully, "I'm sure it is very good of you to take up the cudgels in her behalf. I don't suppose, though, it would have occurred to her that she wanted your good offices, if you hadn't put it into her head that I was a beast, and a lout, and heaven knows what!"

"Don't be a fool!" retorts Charlie, sharply. "A week ago, you were not the least bit in love with her: if you are now, I've done you a good turn by showing you the real state of your feelings. She may only want the same stimulus to be aware of hers. Suppose you carry on the joke about Miss Courtland, just to try her!"

"Thank you," returns Otho. "I am not going to be made a cat's paw of for your convenience."

"All right," says Charlie, lighting a fresh cigar. "Then I will propose something else. Go to-morrow and declare the state of your affections to her. If she accepts you, I promise to retire gracefully into myself, and to treat her as it becomes me to treat my friend's *fiancée*. There! I can't say fairer than that."

Mr. Desmond is far better pleased with this proposition: he thinks over it, smokes over it, talks over it, until he is quite restored to his usual good temper, and until Charlie begins seriously to regret his folly in having made the suggestion. The friends separate, at midnight, on the best of terms. Otho is in a high state of excitement. He is really very much in love by this time, and extremely solicitous about Riette's answer to his declaration. Sleep is a very coy visitant to him upon this occasion, and eight o'clock the next morning finds him on his way to the rectory. He knows pretty well, by this time, the habits and customs of its inmates: the rector

will have gone down to take a look at the stream; Osyth will be occupied in the house; Riette will either be feeding the chickens, or picking fruit for breakfast. He enters by the garden gate, and proceeds to the kitchen-garden, where he finds the object of his affections, looking as cool and fresh as a blush rose-bud in the morning dew.

"Otho!" she says, opening her eyes very wide. "At this time in the morning! Where is Charlie?"

This inquiry rather damps the lover's ardor.

"Oh, snoring away in bed, I suppose!" he replies, trying, with but moderate success, to make his tone indifferent.

"How do you know he snores?" asks Riette, on the defensive.

"Because I broke my boot-jack once, shying it at him to stop him, when we had occasion to occupy the same room."

"I dare say you snore too," says Riette, aggressively.

"I'm sure I don't," cries Otho, indignantly.

"I will ask Charlie when I see him," returns the young lady, mischievously.

"You can if you like," retorts Otho; "but, after the specimen you had of his veracity yesterday, I should hardly have thought you would consider his testimony worth much."

This is not a very promising commencement for a declaration of love, and so Otho feels.

"Riette," he says, softening his voice, and coming nearer to her, "you don't really care anything about Charlie, do you?"

Riette sees a golden opportunity before her. She wishes to gratify her newly-acquired sense of importance, and she wishes to show Otho that for the future he will have to be a great deal more attentive and obsequious, a great deal less independent.

"Indeed I do," she answers, coquettishly,—"very much indeed. I really think I'm getting a little in love with him."

"Oh!" cries Otho, desperately; "then you no longer care for me! my years of devotion count for nothing the moment a stranger comes along with a few plausible words."

"Why should I not care for you?" asks Riette, with much innocence. "Need I like you less, because I like some one else more?"

Oh, rage! oh, madness!

"Then it is true," he almost shrieks, "that you like him *more* than me?"

"It is in a different sort of way," Riette answers, placidly. "I look upon you as a brother; I am just as fond of you as I always was——"

"Look here, Riette," cries the young fellow, coming close up to her, and speaking in hot, eager tones; "I am not going to be trifled with: you must give me an answer, once and for all. You know I have loved you *devotedly*, *madly*, for years; you know I considered we were as good as engaged: I always meant to speak to your father, as soon as you were old enough. And now you fling me over in the most heartless, cruel manner, for an utter stranger."

Riette is charmed. She feels that if Otho were always like this she might fall in love with him quite in a genuine and romantic way. The excitement must certainly be kept up.

"You were not in love with me *devotedly* nor *madly*," she replies, with some disdain: "if you had been, would you have minded making your boots dirty to get me those forget-me-nots? Look at Charlie! Why, he might have injured himself for life, climbing up that ruin to get me a flower I fancied."

"Ask me, order me to do some difficult thing, to risk my life for you," cries poor Otho, the mantle of some chivalrous knight of old descending, for the nonce, upon his shoulders, "and see whether I will not do it!"

Riette is quite triumphant.

"No!" she says, shaking her head: "I can't get over those forget-me-nots."

"Let me go now," he exclaims, eagerly. "I will gather you every single flower for a mile along each bank."

"You would want the clothes-basket and the donkey-cart," says Riette, laughing. "Hark! there is Osyth calling. Coming!" she cries, at the top of her voice. "You will stay and have some breakfast?" she adds.

"No," he replies, moodily: "I only want one thing,—an answer to my question. Will you marry me, Riette?"

His good-looking young face is very eager and troubled as he puts the momentous question.

"No, sir," replies the little witch, dropping him a curtsey. "Thank you all the same for asking me."

"Riette, will you be serious for one moment? If you refuse me, I shall bid you good-by now and forever."

She looks into his earnest blue eyes, that she sees gleam with passion for the first time. She is a little awed, but the spirit of mischief in her overcomes the awe.

"Good-by, now and forever," she repeats, and, laughing, runs away to the house.

Otho stands gazing after her with that look of mingled wrath, love, and misery which women have been wont to bring to men's faces by their caprices and coquetries, ever since the world began.

Then he turns and strides back to Helmstone Park, his heart torn by feelings that he has never known before. Charlie is standing on the broad steps at the entrance.

"What cheer?" he asks, as Otho approaches, though that young man's countenance is sufficiently speaking to make the question not only unnecessary, but unkind.

Whereupon Otho gives vehement utterance to so wicked a word that my pen could not possibly be brought to indite it.

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE PALE, FAIR SAINT.

A CHANGE had come over Osyth's life, almost without her knowing it. Outwardly, everything went on in the usual manner: she exerted her gentle sway in her father's house, visited the poor, ministered to the sick. But a current had begun to flow through all that still life; thoughts, interests far removed from the usual grooves, asserted themselves, and, though she neglected nothing of the old, every-day routine, life had an entirely new aspect for her. Her heart and mind were full of Lord Ryvendale. He was still the fallen angel, but every day his capacities for good seemed to grow and increase, every day her thoughts of him waxed more lenient, more pitying. She began to think of him as one sinned against rather than sinning. Her heart reproached her that she had made so little use of the great opportunity

that had been given her. She forgot that he was a comparative stranger; her thoughts were so full of him, it seemed to her now as though she had known him all her life. Oh, why had she spoken so coldly, so diffidently, when he had been ready to open his heart to her? why had she not entreated and besought him to amend his life whilst there was yet time? How earnestly she had been able to plead, ere now, with poor sinners, with men and women in her own village! and why, since all men are alike in God's sight, should she have hesitated and faltered because Lord Ryvendale was a man of rank and wealth? His soul was in more danger than the poor man's soul: had not Christ himself said how hard it was for the rich man to enter heaven? and yet, when she might have spoken, she had refrained. If only the chance were given her once more! And all this time she believed that it was for his sake she desired so keenly to see Lord Ryvendale again, and knew not that her own heart craved for him, and that the restlessness of all those who love humanly had entered into her soul.

A week passed: it was Sunday again: Osyth was in her place at church, trying to restrain her wandering thoughts. Since she was a child, she never remembered to have been obliged to make so hard an effort. The last notes of the voluntary were dying away, the rector was about to rise to his feet, when a rich rustling of silk was heard in the aisle. No one but Lady Ryvendale wore such silk. There was a man's footstep as well. Osyth felt a strange fluttering at her heart. Her keen ear heard the click of the pew door: some involuntary power compelled her to look up. No, it was only the footman, carrying her ladyship's books. It was almost a sin to Osyth that her eyes should have wandered in church. She went through all the service afterwards with more than her wonted devotion and earnestness: it was only when the effort was over, and she was walking down the church path, that she was conscious of a cold feeling of disappointment. As she took her usual walk round the garden with her father, after the morning service, her thoughts would stray back to the previous Sunday, when Lord Ryvendale had been her companion.

But other interests were in store, which, for the time, effectually banished all recollection of Lord Ryvendale. The

whole party at the rectory had been surprised that neither Otho nor his friend appeared at church. Riette was considerably chagrined. She had told Osyth, from whom she never had a secret in her life, of Otho's strange behavior the preceding morning, and Osyth had gently chidden her for being thoughtless and teasing. But Riette was looked upon as such a child, by both father and sister, that any serious ideas of marrying or giving in marriage as concerned her would have seemed absurd to them. Both had a secret hope that, ultimately, she would be the wife of Otho, whom they heartily loved and esteemed; but that was quite a thing of the future. Even her flirtation with Charlie had not opened their eyes: it was so public, so naïve, that it scarcely caused her elders a moment's thought.

But when, after lunch on Sunday, Mr. Egerton arrived with a somewhat embarrassed air, and told them that Otho had left Helmstone Park the previous day, but that he himself was staying on a few days by Sir George's express invitation, Osyth, at least, began to entertain uneasy suspicions. Charlie accompanied them to afternoon church, and Osyth could not fail to notice the admiring glances that he constantly sent in the direction of Riette, nor his solicitude in finding the hymns for her. She resolved not to leave the two young people to a tête-à-tête after church, and mentally gave up her usual Sunday afternoon visits. But "*l'homme propose.*" The moment service was over, a message came, begging Mr. Sartoris to go and administer the last sacrament to a dying woman, and Osyth, who took a deep interest in the poor creatures, abandoned Charlie and Riette to their fate, and accompanied her father.

"Do not go out of the grounds!" she whispered hurriedly to her sister, for it was one thing to be seen walking the fields with Otho, and another to be alone in company with a stranger. So the two repaired to the little wood that led from the rectory garden towards the Helmstone Woods, but was still a part of the "grounds."

Two hours later, Riette hung upon her sister's neck, with smiles and tears and blushes, confessing to her that Charlie had offered her his hand and heart and was going to speak to her father that very evening,—that she thought she was really very fond of him, and that it would be very nice to be engaged.

The news was a severe shock to Osyth. How often had she thought with a sweet, sisterly pleasure of the happy, perhaps brilliant, future in store for Riette as Otho's wife! And who was Mr. Egerton? She knew nothing to inspire her with any confidence in him, except that he was a pleasant-mannered young fellow and seemed very much in love with Riette. But to give their darling, their cherished ewe lamb, to a stranger, —the thought was not to be borne. And yet to thwart her, to see her grieved and unhappy, that was more impossible still.

"You will break it to papa, Osie, won't you?" whispered Riette, raising her pretty, blushing face to her sister's; and Osyth went with reluctant steps to seek her father. The rector was positively aghast.

"It won't do at all! not at all!" he said, shaking his head. "Oh, my dear, I fear we have looked too much upon Riette as a child. I never dreamed of anything of this sort. Otho gone away, too! the child refused him! I can hardly believe I am in my senses. And what do we know of this young man? Nothing! And you say that our poor child fancies herself in love with him? Oh, it is not to be thought of! I must hear what he has to say, of course; but as to permitting any engagement, I cannot and will not."

"We must be very careful, papa," said Osyth, gently. "If we seem to thwart the poor darling, she may really fancy herself in love."

The rector is the most benign and benevolent of beings, but, as we know, it is not safe for a stranger to touch the young of the gentlest of animals. When Mr. Egerton was ushered into his presence, there was a severe expression on his countenance, thoroughly alien from his usual kind and beaming regard. It inspired the too confident swain with a sense of something like awe. His indifferent qualifications, his mediocre prospects, his general ineligibility, smote him suddenly: his self-possession vanished, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

The rector could not but observe the effect he had produced, and he, whose heart melted immediately to the culprit robbing his orchard, hardened himself against this presumptuous would-be robber, and he stiffened his neck and his countenance yet more. He, the least ambitious, the most unworldly of men, saw in the probability of a want of prospects a loop-

hole by which to get rid of the young man and his aspirations.

Charlie stammered and floundered: the rector was merciless; he was not at all sorry for the lad, and would not hold out even a straw for him to catch at. Charlie could not believe this was the jolly, benevolent old rector, from whom he had not anticipated the smallest trouble.

"I—I—your daughter——" he began.

"Well, sir" (sternly), "my daughter?"

"I am aware that I am almost a—a stranger to you," stammered Charlie.

"Quite so, Mr. Egerton: we only know you as a friend of Otho's, and, as Otho is very dear to us *all*" (with emphasis), "we accepted you on that ground, without thinking any further knowledge necessary. We are deeply grieved at his sudden departure: perhaps *you* can throw some light upon it."

The rector looked positively fierce.

"I—he—that is we, unfortunately—at least, not unfortunately, but—but the fact is, we both love your daughter."

"I must say, Mr.——Mr. Egerton," replied the rector, with increased severity, "that this is a most extraordinary, most unlooked-for revelation on your part. It is not yet a week since you came to Helmstone, and you would have me to understand that you are absolutely making pretensions to my daughter's hand?"

Charlie felt very bad indeed.

"Don't you believe in love at first sight, sir?" he asked, mournfully.

"No, I do not" (decisively); "at all events, not in its having any stability, or being worth anything."

"Oh, sir, I adore Riette."

"Be good enough, Mr. Egerton, not to speak of my daughter by her Christian name, until you have some sort of right or authority to do so."

"Do you refuse to listen to my suit, sir?" said Charlie, crestfallen for almost the first time in his life.

"Explain yourself, if you please," uttered the rector, stiffly.

"Surely, sir, you cannot fail to understand that I have come to ask your permission to marry Ri—Miss Riette."

"Very well, sir: as I know nothing at all about you, I

must ask you to be so good as to answer a few questions. Who and what is your father?"

Charlie breathed: that was a question there was no difficulty in answering.

"My father possesses a large property in Midlandshire."

"Are you his eldest son?"

"No."

"Second?"

"No. I have two brothers older than myself."

"Is the property entailed?"

"Yes," answered Charlie, reluctantly, and saying at the same time to himself, "These old devil-dodgers are all alike with their grasping ways."

"Have you any expectations?"

"No-o, not in particular."

"What is your income at the present moment?"

"I have my pay, and my father allows me two hundred a year."

"And you think that is an income sufficient to marry upon, do you, Mr. Egerton?" asked the rector, grimly, remembering, though, with a qualm at his heart, how many years of his life his own income had been no larger.

"I have no doubt my father would increase my allowance," said Charlie, diffidently.

"Very well. Be so good as to give me his address, and I will write to him on the subject to-morrow."

Charlie's face fell considerably.

"Pray, Mr. Sartoris," he entreated, "allow me to write first, to prepare his mind."

"Certainly not. You can write by the same post. I will permit nothing but what is open and above-board. If your father objects, so——" "much the better," he was about to add, but finished with, "so shall I. Until I receive his answer I must desire that you hold no communication of any kind with my daughter. Good-evening, Mr. Egerton."

The rector did not even offer his hand to his son-in-law presumptive, but made him a stiff bow, and poor Charlie went out a sadder if not a wiser man than he had entered.

Mr. Sartoris experienced great pangs of conscience after his unwonted severity: a fear smote him that perhaps his darling might suffer if he remained implacable. It was utterly im-

possible for him to play the part of the stern father. He felt half inclined to run after the young man, bring him back, and say, "Bless you, my children!" there and then.

He walked into the drawing-room, where he found his two daughters. Riette was sitting at Osyth's feet: her cheeks were flushed with unwonted color; there was a bright look in her eyes. The rector's heart smote him: he felt a sort of Jephthah,—as though he were about to sacrifice his best-beloved. All the benevolent, tender expression of his face returns fourfold, as he contemplates Riette's bright, sweet face.

"Well, my darling," he says, "I have been hearing a strange confession. Is it really true that you wish to marry this young man?"

"Oh, no, papa," Riette answers naïvely; "not to marry him: we only want to be engaged."

"What! to 'keep company,' like the maids do?" asks her father, half smiling, half grave. "My dear, in our position in life, such a state of things is not usual. And, besides," he adds, "you are quite a child. Why, how many months is it that you have worn long frocks? And," putting his hand affectionately on her shoulder, "you would not surely leave me and Osyth for a stranger?"

The tears are in Riette's eyes: it is not really that she is so much in love with Charlie, but such an unusual excitement in her quiet life must needs be followed by a reaction, and tears are not an unnatural concomitant of the situation. They begin to fall fast: she gives a little hysterical sob, and hides her face in Osyth's bosom. The poor rector feels more than ever like Jephthah. He will certainly go over to Helmstone Park the first thing in the morning, and bring back the young soldier.

Osyth carries off her sister to bed, and then returns to Mr. Sartoris, who is pacing his room in deep agitation.

"I suppose it must be," he says, in a despairing tone as she enters. "I cannot see the poor darling's heart broken."

"I do not think it will be that, papa dear," answers Osyth, gently. "In my own mind I cannot help fancying that the novelty of the idea is its great charm. Still, if we oppose it too much, it may end by her thinking a great deal more about him. Suppose you leave it just as it is: tell Mr. Egerton that you cannot consent to any engagement at present, but that in a year's time, if they are both of the same opinion,

you may be led to entertain the idea. They are both such children, and, I really think, not very much in earnest. Let him wish her 'good-by,' and consent to their writing once now and then: that will prevent their treasuring up any idea that they are ill used."

Mr. Sartoris sleeps on his daughter's counsel, and finds it admirable. He sends for Charlie, who is amazed to find him all benevolence again, and the young fellow is so relieved to find his father is not going to be written to (knowing full well that sire's hasty temperament) that he consents like a lamb to the rector's stipulations. He and Riette are permitted to take private leave of each other and to exchange vows of eternal fidelity. He presents her with the locket from his chain, and she gives him a lock of her hair, rather an awkward present for him now that he has parted with his locket. On bidding her farewell, he wishes to kiss her pretty lips, but Riette is coy, and he is only permitted to salute that portion of her cheek which borders on her ear, and the young soldier, who generally has audacity enough for a regiment, somehow does not dare attempt to take by force a privilege that is not freely permitted him.

So he departs, and Riette finds it dull, although her father and sister pet her more than ever and devise many plans for her amusement.

Osyth has been so occupied all the week with her sister's affairs that she has scarcely had time to think of anything else. Lord Ryvendale has ceased to monopolize her thoughts. The following Sunday, she is so absorbed in prayer for her little sister that she neither hears the rustling of Lady Ryvendale's silk, nor the man's tread, nor even the click of the pew-door. But when the service has commenced, some impulse draws, as by a thousand cords, her eyes back to the Desmond pew, and she meets Lord Ryvendale's steady gaze full. She averts them swiftly, but her face is dyed with crimson blushes, her heart throbs, a sudden revelation comes to her of what her real feelings towards him are.

And he,—a sudden thrill of joy runs through his veins. He has always been greedy of women's love, and since he first saw this pale, fair saint, he has been haunted by the thought of her sanctity and his own unworthiness. That he can inspire her with the same feeling that other women know,

is a rare triumph to him,—she who has seemed as far removed from him as an angel in heaven. He has thought of her constantly for the last fortnight, and each day has seemed to part him farther from her, to make his life darker as hers grew fairer. Then he had felt an irresistible longing to see her again: the old troubled, miserable feeling was creeping back over him,—the feeling that only her sweet calm voice could lay to rest. He had been with Viva, whose unhappiness only seemed to augment his own, and he had been in the gay world, that seemed more hollow, more unsatisfying to him than ever. The pretty women who flirted with him and were eager to claim his attention seemed bold and immodest to him by contrast with the fair saint, as he always called her to himself: the only attributes that could charm him in a woman now were unsullied purity and innocence.

When Lord Ryvendale felt that hunger for the sight of Osyth, he resolved to see her again: he never denied himself a gratification that was attainable. When he beheld her emotion at the sight of him, his heart cried out that he must and would win her love. All through that calm, quiet service, it was beating with tumultuous thoughts and hopes: a thousand plans and ideas ran riot in his brain.

Osyth was scarcely less disturbed: in vain she tried, by outward devotion, to compel her wandering mind; in vain she tried to check the joy that welled up in her heart at the thought that he was near her.

Lord Ryvendale was waiting in the porch when she came out. Lady Ryvendale had hastened to the carriage, for there was a cold wind blowing. When he pressed her hand, when he looked with his eloquent eyes into hers, Osyth trembled: she felt that her power had gone from her: he was no longer the sinner, the penitent, whom she could rebuke: it was she who was abashed before him.

"May I come over this afternoon to the rectory after church?" he said, and she gave an embarrassed consent.

Then he joined Lady Ryvendale, and they drove away.

Riette had lingered behind in the church for her father, and had not seen the meeting. Osyth told them when they came out, trying to control the nervousness in her voice, and wondering inwardly at the jubilance of her own heart.

"I am sorry I shall not be at home," said the rector.

"Not at home, papa?"

"I had a note from Sir George a minute ago (his servant brought it to the vestry), asking me to go to him after afternoon service, and I sent a message saying I would be with him. You must make my apologies to Lord Ryvendale: perhaps I may still find him on my return."

"I think I will walk to the village and tell my old people that I may be late this afternoon," says Osyth, with a little blush. Riette smiles significantly; but Osyth do esnot observe it.

Lord Ryvendale does not wait till service is over, but actually comes to afternoon church. He is somewhat late: the congregation is kneeling at the Absolution as he walks up the aisle. Osyth does not look round once during the service, but she feels that he is there. And he, who has never been twice to church in one Sunday since he was a boy at Eton, has come from no sudden access of piety: his heart is full of worldly thoughts and longings. He wants to feast his eyes on a devout figure, the outline of a cheek, the small portion of fair white neck that is visible between a coil of brown hair and a lace ruffle. And yet, though it is the creature, not the Creator, he has come to worship, there is no thought in his heart that could profane the sanctity of the spot: it is still purity and holiness that he is in love with. And more than once the unspoken words echo in his inmost heart, "Would God I were more worthy of her!"

---

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE CHRONICLE OF SAINT OSYTH.

THE rector is able to make his apologies personally to Lord Ryvendale, whom he joins at the church door. Riette insists on accompanying her father to the gates of Helmstone Park, and Alsager is left alone with Osyth. She is somewhat shy and embarrassed, but he is radiant, triumphant, careless of the future,—of all, save the enjoyment of being alone in the presence of the girl whom he loves. Ah! love is a strange,

sudden thing sometimes, kindled rapidly, as the spark from flint and steel: the slower growth is better to be trusted. He no longer seems the same man that he was fourteen days ago, weary at heart, burdened by his sin, eager for the quiet paths of peace. His manner is almost gay; the despairing look has gone out of his eyes: ah! they have quite another expression to-day. He is saying to Osyth,—

"You do not know how much good my talk with you at Ryvendale did me. I felt a different man for days after. But the old feeling was creeping back, and I resolved to see you and get you to preach me another of your charming sermons. Do you know that just merely the sight of you in church seemed to do me good? that is why I came again this afternoon. I should be afraid to say how long it is since I went to church twice in one day."

Osyth would fain make some rejoinder, but no words come to her: she is silent and abashed. Lord Ryvendale takes up the thread of talk: he is seldom at a loss for words.

"I have been thinking over what you said about my responsibilities, and last night my sister and I were talking the matter over, and she thinks that, if you will co-operate with her, a good deal may be done to benefit the poor on my estate."

"Oh, that is good of you!" says Osyth. And for the first time she lifts her soft brown eyes to his face.

"Good of me?" he echoes. "Why, what a monster you must have thought me, if you are surprised at my making a feeble effort to follow your good counsels!"

"Oh, no," she says, and looks away again.

"If you knew," he utters, in a low voice, "how I have longed in these past days since I saw you, how I have longed to be something worthier,—to cut myself adrift from my past life and begin afresh."

"Oh, why do you not?" pleads Osyth, rousing herself to energy.

"Why? Because I am bound by a chain that men call honor,—a chain that ties me inexorably to the consequences of past folly, that forbids me to think of love and happiness in the future. Oh, if I dared tell you how my soul yearns after a better life, how I long for the influence of some good, pure woman to make me different from what I am, to win

me from the life I am leading, and give me a fresh start that might make existence worth something more than it is now!"

He pauses, but no voice replies. How is it, Osyth, that you are dumb? Why are your eyes downcast? why do the tears quiver on their lashes? Have you not longed for an opportunity like this to speak, to say some eloquent earnest word that shall turn the sinner from his sin and from the wrath to come? Is it that you are smitten with pity for the woman who, having been loved, should be forsaken by him, or is it that in the depths of his stirring voice you hear the quiver which tells you that you are the woman whom he seeks? You dare not plead against her, if her loss were to be your gain.

She is silent. Alsager recovers himself with a shock. How dares he say these things to her, when he knows his wild dreams can never come to pass, that he is bound irrevocably to a woman whom he loved more deeply, more passionately (though he has forgotten it now), than it will ever be given him to love again?

Riette's appearance relieves them both from their embarrassment.

Osyth suddenly remembers the duties of hospitality, and invites Lord Ryvendale to have tea or wine. He is not a drinker of afternoon tea; nevertheless he accepts the offered refreshment, reflecting that it will give him a pretext for prolonging his visit.

Osyth goes away to the house, and Alsager is left with Riette.

"What has become of your two friends?" he asks her, and Riette, coloring vividly and looking away, says, trying to make her voice indifferent, "Oh, they have gone away."

Alsager divines that he has selected an inconvenient topic of conversation, and makes haste to change it.

"What quaint names you and your sister have!" he remarks. "I wish you would tell me their origin."

"Mine is very simple. I was christened Harriet,—a frightful name, is it not?—and mamma would always have me called Riette."

"Riette," repeats Lord Ryvendale: "it is a pretty name. And your sister's? is that an abbreviation too?"

"Oh, no: she is called after a Saxon saint. Mamma was

called Osyth too. Her godfather was Lord Rochdale, who had a lovely old place, St. Osyth Priory,—one of the oldest places in England, I believe."

"And I suppose," suggests Alsager, "that there is a legend of the saint belonging to it."

"Yes. Would you like to hear it?"

"Immensely," he replies. He has begun to find something soft and sweet in the name, since it is connected with all his thoughts of "the fair saint."

"Once upon a time," begins Riette, solemnly, but there she comes to a full stop.

"I will go and get the book," she says, rising.

"No, no," entreats Alsager. "I would far rather hear you tell it."

But the little maid shakes her head.

"No; I should keep stopping and filling up the gaps with 'and so—and so'—as papa says I always do. I won't be a minute." And she flies off towards the house.

"She is a pretty little thing. What lovely hands and feet! I did not think her half so nice the other day," Alsager reflects.

Here Riette comes hurrying back.

"There!" she says, giving him the book: "you can read it yourself."

"I would rather hear it from you," he answers, and his eyes have the same effect upon Riette that they have on most women: she does what they ask of her.

"Oh," she remarks, when she has found the place, "it does not begin 'Once upon a time,' after all. I thought it did."

"Once upon a time' is a capital beginning, if perhaps a little hackneyed," returns Alsager, laughing.

Riette is trying to get the heavy old tome comfortable. She supports it on one knee, crossed over the other, and grips it tightly with her tiny hands. One little foot is dangling down, and presents to Lord Ryvendale's appreciative glance the same spectacle that delighted Charlie and enraged Otho. Riette is supremely unconscious of the pleasure she is unintentionally giving.

"Do you like the name of Osyth?" she inquires, peering at her auditor over the top of the book.

"I think it charming," he answers, impressively, though in

all probability, had he been asked the question a fortnight and a day previously, he would have responded, "No: it is outlandish and unmeaning."

Riette commences, in her childish, flute-like voice:

"St. Osyth was the daughter of King Frithwald and Queen Wilburga, daughter of the King of Mercia. She was brought up by St. Modwen, who later confided her to the care of St. Edith. One day she was sent by St. Edith to carry a book to St. Modwen, and, the wind being violent, as she crossed the wooden bridge she was thrown into the river and swept away by the stream. St. Edith, being warned in a dream by an angel of what had befallen her, repaired in great distress to St. Modwen, and both prostrated themselves for a long time in prayer. Then St. Modwen, arising from the ground, exclaimed in a loud voice three times, 'Osyth! Osyth! Osyth! in the name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, emerge from the river and come forth safe and sound.' The holy virgin had not finished before the maiden came out from the river, uninjured, and with the book in her hand, crying thrice, 'Here I am, my lady!' St. Modwen, with great joy, restored her to St. Edith. Some time afterwards, Osyth returned to her parents and advanced daily in all graces and virtues. She was betrothed to King Sighere against her wish, for she desired to take vows of perpetual virginity. She was, however, married to the king, but immediately after the ceremony Sighere was informed that a stag of remarkable beauty was running hither and thither in front of the palace, and he immediately went out and actively took part in the chase. His queen, feeling as one having escaped shipwreck, gave thanks to Christ as her liberator, and without delay summoned the bishops of the East Saxons. She expressed to them her desire to become a nun, and they, acceding to her wish, placed a nun's habit upon her. When the king returned from hunting, he hastened to visit the queen, and was deeply grieved at finding what she had done."

"Did it not serve him right?" cries Riette, breaking off in the narrative and looking up in Alsager's face.

"Certainly," he answers. "Still, I don't think they would have turned out a very happy couple, as the bridegroom immediately went off deerstalking, and the bride thanked Christ for getting rid of him."

"But don't you see," argues Riette, "she did not want to marry him, and he *did* want to marry her? so it was abominable of *him*. I think I should wish to take the veil if my husband jumped up in the middle of the wedding-breakfast and went off hunting."

"I am sure he would have better taste," says Alsager, smiling; and Riette smiles too, and proceeds with her book.

"He, however, built her a monastery——"

"A monastery?" interrupts Lord Ryvendale.

"That's what it says. Look!" And Riette points with her finger to the word.

"—a monastery, and there Osyth repaired with some other virgins, and lived a life of great sanctity. In October, 653, a band of Dacians, stirred up by the devil, arrived in ships, cruelly plundered the inhabitants of Chich, and set fire to their houses. The chief of the accursed band tried every means in his power to make Osyth sacrifice to his gods, and threatened her with stripes. But the virgin spurned both his blandishments and his threats. He then pronounced upon her sentence of decapitation. Without delay, Osyth's head was severed from her body and fell upon the ground. She immediately took it up with both hands and with steady steps proceeded to the church of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, which was distant three stadia, and, being led by an angel, stopped at the door of the church which was closed, and, striking it with her blood-stained hands that it might open to her, left traces of her blood upon it and fell prostrate. On the spot where the glorious virgin was martyred, a fountain of pure water gushed forth, yielding cures for many diseases."

"That," says Riette, shutting the book, "is the story of the first Osyth."

"And here comes the last," observes Lord Ryvendale, "and with her head safe upon her shoulders, I am happy to see. A thousand thanks for your interesting legend."

"What are you doing, darling?" asks Osyth, coming up, though, from the book in Riette's hand, she readily divines.

"I have been reading Lord Ryvendale *your* story," says Riette, nodding. "And he agrees with me that Sighere was a wretch."

"Perhaps *Saint* Osyth was not handsome," suggests Alsager.

"Oh, yes, she was—lovely," returns Riette. "I will show you her picture."

Then they all stroll towards the house. Whilst Osyth pours out the tea, Riette fetches the picture. It is a small, exquisite water-color drawing, and represents St. Osyth at the moment when she has risen from the stream. The face is that of Osyth, but idealized, spiritualized, till there is no longer anything "of the earth, earthy," about it.

"It is a portrait of you," says Lord Ryvendale, looking up at Osyth, after gazing long and intently at the picture.

"Oh, no, no," she murmurs, blushing.

Riette claps her hands.

"Of course it is, though St. Osyth looks as if she had never seen beef or mutton, does not she?"

"And I look as if I had?" smiles Osyth, trying to turn the conversation.

"Of course you do. I should be very sorry if you looked like that poor creature."

Alsager begins to wonder jealously who painted this sweet picture: it was evidently some one who loved her, and had sought to indicate the graces and beauties of her character, and the purity of her mind, in this lovely, shadowy form.

"May one ask who the artist is?" he says, with unconscious stiffness.

"He was a college friend of papa's: he is very celebrated now, you know," Riette answers.

Lord Ryvendale feels comforted. But he is seized with a wild desire to possess a copy of this sketch. Yet he dares not even hint his wish. It would have been an easy enough thing to ask permission of a woman of the world to have it copied, whether she chose to grant his prayer or deny it, but Osyth was not in any way to be treated like the other women with whom he mixed. So, after another long, long look, he lays it down with a regretful sigh.

"I do not believe I have given you my sister's message, after all," he says, presently. "She will be so glad if you will lunch with her to-morrow and talk over a subject that interests you both." And he smiles. "She will call if you consent, and drive you up in the pony-carriage."

"I shall be very glad," Osyth answers, almost afraid at the pleasure that thrills through her heart at the thought.

Then Lord Ryendale takes his leave.

"Osyth," says Riette, when he is fairly gone, "I knew he was going to fall in love with you, and he has. I shall be right after all, and you will be 'my lady'!"

A shaft of pain, a throb of pleasure, so subtly blended that she knows not which is stronger, stir Osyth's breast at her sister's words.

"Darling," she utters, in a low, quick voice, "if you do not want to pain me, never say these things again."

But Riette goes up to her and throws her arms round her neck.

"Do not I tell you everything? and why should you have secrets from me? Do you think I cannot read your face as well as his? He is so nice, so handsome, and there is some one worth reforming. Would not you like to get him away from that wicked duchess?"

"Riette," cries Osyth, "what do you know? who has told you?"

"Oh," says Riette, tossing her head, but blushing a little at her own indiscretion, "you fancy I am such a baby and know nothing. I really think I may be considered grown up, now I have had two offers" (with a touch of conscious pride).

"If you know so much, then," replies her sister, in a troubled voice, "you must know that there can never, *never* be anything between Lord Ryvendale and me."

"But he can leave her. He is not married to her, because the duke is her husband, and I suppose even French people cannot have two husbands, can they? However, I won't talk about it, Osie, if it vexes you; but we shall see." And Riette nods oracularly as she goes out.

Osyth's heart is sore troubled within her. She is vexed that Riette should have acquired, however remotely, this knowledge of evil; but there is a pain still keener gnawing at her breast. She has awakened to the consciousness that she loves this man,—loves him none the less for the evil that she knows of him. She would fain believe him gold; she sees him clay. All those who love, be they men or women, desire to justify their love by believing the object of it worthy, but women, oh, much more than men! Whilst passion only desires to degrade, true love places the beloved on the highest pedestal and seeks to ennoble it with all good gifts and

graces. And to have set up an idol, and all the while to know it base,—to look up at its godlike head and yet be forced to see its feet of clay,—that is indeed a pang to the true heart!

The pony-carriage comes the next day to fetch Osyth, but it is Lord Ryvendale, not his sister-in-law, who drives it.

"There is rather a cold wind: my sister was afraid to drive in an open carriage, and deputed me to come for you instead. I hope you are not afraid to trust yourself to me."

This is what Alsager says, and he looks at Osyth as he has been wont to look, all his life, at the women who have found favor in his eyes.

But since yesterday he has been telling himself that he must not see her much more, nor feel this pleasure in her company, for her sake as well as his own, since there is no hope of his being more to her than a friend. It has struck him that a friendship with so fair and good a woman might be a real solace and boon to him, but Lord Ryvendale is a man of the world, and knows quite well that friendship between men and women who are still young is a thing possible only under the most exceptional circumstances. And this is not one of them.

He studies to make the conversation commonplace as they drive towards Ryvendale, and Osyth feels a sense of relief. Lady Ryvendale welcomes her warmly on her arrival, and there is much talk about the poor and what is to be done for them. Lord Ryvendale seems to enter heartily into the subject, and gives the two fair enthusiasts carte-blanche to do what they will, being quite sure that neither is likely to let her enthusiasm outstrip her good sense. Alsager does not even attempt a tête-à-tête with Osyth, and even when his sister-in-law pleads one or two important letters, and leaves them alone, he only shows her the pictures in the gallery and some photographs of the house and grounds. He is determined not to betray by word or look the growing passion that he feels for her, and this once his effort at self-mastery is successful. But when he has seen her to the carriage, and wished her "good-by," he goes with slow steps to his room, and, throwing himself into a low chair, mutters, with a weary gesture,—

"What is the use of making myself more wretched by being

with her and seeing how sweet and good she is? It only makes me worse afterwards."

Then he rings the bell.

"Tell Fletcher to pack my things and order the brougham to be round at six," he says to the servant. "I am going to town to-night." And he goes in search of Lady Ryvendale.

"Oh, Alsager! you are not going!" she cries, in a tone of the deepest disappointment.

"Yes, Gertrude, I am."

"But why this sudden freak?"

He answers her in slow, decided tones,—

"If I were to see much of that girl, I should be in love with her. Some day I might forget what honor demands of me; I might be tempted to say to myself that I am free, and to act as though I were. Then I could never forgive myself Let me go while there is yet time!"

"Alsager! Alsager!" cries Lady Ryvendale, desperately; but he raises his hand, saying,—

"Hush! do not attempt to dissuade me. Good-by, my dear. I wish to God I could stay—and be happy."

Alsager goes out with a slow step, a weary wretched look on his face, and Lady Ryvendale throws herself into a chair and bursts into tears.

"Oh, that horrid, vile, detestable woman!" she cries.

---

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CURSE OF POSSESSION.

THAT horrid, vile, detestable woman!

How has it fared with her who is called by these cruel names, but whom we only remember as the lovely, graceful Duchesse de Lallière?

"Be sure your sin will find you out."

Ah! has she not endorsed the truth of that text a thousand times with bitter tears, in agony of heart? And yet her sin had not been the fruit of a wanton, vehement passion, such a one as flies openly in the face of God's laws and the decrees

of the world: it was almost a dire alternative, forced upon her by a chain of fatal events. She had been misjudged, misunderstood, branded with shame whilst yet innocent, her whole life to come blasted by a sequence of circumstances whose evidence it would have been impossible to disprove: she had fallen into a state of mental stupor and depression that made the future seem almost indifferent to her. And then, when her heart's need was sorest, love was offered her, love such as she had dreamed of,—ardent, heart-felt, passionate love, that was a kind of worship, that seemed to exalt her out of the sadness, the shame and misery into which she had guiltlessly fallen.

And gradually, by slow degrees, Alsager became master of all her heart,—came to be to her what the oak is to the ivy. Without him, she would have been as the ivy when some wild hurricane has uprooted the strong tree round which it clung and twined. The love of him made her proud sensitive heart strong to bear humiliation for his sake; for, strive to shelter her as he might, no lover's arms are strong or stout enough to ward off the shafts that the world hurls at an erring woman. Live in the most absolute retirement they might and did, but they were both too high-placed in society to escape inquisitive notice. At first Viva scarcely felt regret or remorse for the step she had taken. I have read in some French book a passage like the following: "*La conscience de la femme attend, pour lui reprocher quelque chose, que l'homme ne l'aime plus. Le remords nait de l'abandon.*"

As the months went by, their positions towards each other began almost imperceptibly to change: Viva became the worshipper,—Alsager the idol. Why is that law of nature absolute, that makes a man's love grow cooler and more careless as the woman's love increases? And why does a woman's love grow in proportion as the man's ardor wanes? Perhaps because love waxes stronger and deeper from the sacrifices made to it, as a fire burns fiercer and stronger for the fuel heaped upon it.

It came to pass that Alsager, who at first could scarcely bear the beloved one out of his sight, began to find her perpetual presence less absolutely necessary to his happiness, and was able to leave her for several hours at a stretch without feeling any painful consciousness of an unfilled want. He could read

the papers with considerable absorption, and began to take a lively interest in the world's doings. But to Viva, Alsager was the Alpha and the Omega of everything. She could not bear him away from her, and was distracted, in his absence, with the most unreasonable apprehensions for his safety. If anything were to happen to him——! but no! the thought was so awful, she dared not permit herself to entertain it. Gradually a painful feeling began to grow up in her heart that she was no longer all-sufficient for him. She made superhuman efforts to find topics of conversation to amuse him,—she, who had been such a brilliant talker in the old days. But then she lived in the world; then she was in a vortex of gayety, when every moment yielded some fresh subject of interest; and now, by common consent, all mention of people whom they had known was tabooed; no allusion was made to the doings of that society in which Viva once took so prominent a part, but from which even her name is ostracized to-day. The past appeared a dream,—a dream dreamed long ago; her husband, her wrongs, seemed things of the past, surrounded by a haze of unreality. Hackneyed and misapplied as the expression has often been, it was true of Viva that she felt herself in God's sight to be Alsager's wife, and never for one instant, in these days, did she dream but that they would be faithful to each other until their lives' end. All the agony of discovering how a man's faith differs from a woman's, all the shame and despair of learning how small a claim a guilty woman has on her tempter, all the anguish that must inevitably come to *every* woman who treads that most thorny path of sin, lie yet before her. Who says that the ways of sin and vice are pleasant and flowery? It is false! the flowers are the deadly nightshade, the trees are Upas-trees.

Alsager began to weary of Italy: the heat was getting intolerable; he sickened of the blue, garish Italian sky, and remembered lovingly the cool green leafy ways of his own land. He was a fisherman: he recollected that the May-fly was on the water, and the thing in life most desirable and attractive to him now seemed salmon-fishing. Why should they not go to Ireland? Viva made no objection: his will was her law, and she was far less likely to meet any one whom she knew there than here. So they went, and she was initiated into the mysteries of fly-fishing; but, being tender-hearted, she soon

relinquished her new accomplishment, and contented herself with bearing Alsager company and looking the other way when the fish was killed. She was not altogether a convert to the belief that a fish has no feeling, particularly when it happened to be a vigorous, powerful twenty-pound salmon.

They spent two months in Ireland; then Alsager, hearing that his sister-in-law had gone abroad, was seized by a violent desire to see Ryvendale. It was his now. He would only be gone four days, he promised on his honor, and Viva, sorrowfully wondering how he could bear the parting that was such agony to her, consented to let him go. He went. The place, lovely at all times, was looking its best. He was smitten with home-sickness: it no longer seemed impossible that Viva should come back to her own country: he refused to realize that there would be misery for her in such a life. To him it would be heaven to take possession of all this fair domain and to have with him there the woman whom he still passionately loved. He would defy the county; he cared for none of its magnates; he had plenty of friends who would be but too glad to come to him for his own sake. As the express train whirled him back to Viva, his heart was joyously full of plans for the future: it did not occur to him that she would absolutely refuse to do anything upon which he had set his heart. But, to Viva, this was the one thing impossible: it sent a keen pang to her heart that he could for one moment entertain the thought of exposing her to such bitter humiliation. Lord Ryvendale abandoned the idea,—Viva was still first in his heart,—but the disappointment was intense. For the first time a cloud came between them: it was no bigger than a man's hand yet, but each was painfully conscious of its existence.

Ultimately, Alsager decided upon taking a house for her in one of the loveliest parts of Surrey. It was so retired, no one could have dreamed that it was scarcely more than a score of miles from London. He surrounded her with everything that could add to her comfort: if her establishment lacked the state of that of the Duchesse de Lallière, it was still sufficiently luxurious to satisfy a woman accustomed to the elegancies of life. She had her horses, her carriages, a staff of well-trained servants: there was not a single thing to remind her that she had no claim to the name she bore. Except that she was alone.

Except that, in that Alsager's absence, she never exchanged a word with any human being but Désirée, the housekeeper, or her servants. Faithful Désirée submitted, for the sake of her mistress, to banishment from her own land, but it was pain and grief to her. Fletcher, Lord Ryvendale's man, was her devoted slave; he was always imploring her to marry him, but she shook her head with decision. Désirée did not dislike him, but she had begun to think badly of men.

Alsager paid frequent visits to London. A man must do something: the most ardent lover cannot sit forever at the feet of his mistress: you may depend Hercules soon got over his spinning fit.

When a man gets weary or bored, he goes at once in search of distraction. When a woman is oppressed by the same feelings, she must sit idly and bemoan her fate; she has not the resources of the other sex: hence the lot of an idle woman is far more to be pitied than that of an idle man. In former days, dulness, enforced idleness, were things unknown to Viva: society gives her votaries as much work as necessity: women in the highest and lowest spheres rarely have much leisure for morbid reflections. When Alsager was absent, Viva felt lost: she would wander about her lovely gardens in the morning, drive in the afternoon, and look a thousand times at the clock and wonder how the laggard hours could crawl so slowly. And somehow, when he came, great and intense as was her joy at having him with her, she had but little to say to him. And, insensibly almost, Alsager, though he still loved her, began to contrast her with the charming, gracious duchess whom every one had courted. He did not realize—men rarely do—what creatures of circumstance women are, nor how, chameleon-like, they take their color from surrounding objects. The woman who lives among appreciative people is charming, gracious, witty without effort; but take away her entourage, condemn her to solitude and sad thoughts, and you will scarcely recognize her: she will become restless, morbid, miserable.

Autumn and winter passed away: the spring brought with it a new source of uneasiness both to Lord Ryvendale and to Viva. The link that knits so firmly and happily the love of those whose love is lawful is a bond of terror, of anguish, of remorse, to those who have no name, no social status, to give

the innocent creature whose very existence is a reproach to them. With what acclamation, with what rejoicings, would an heir to the dukedom of Lallière have been received! At Ryvendale, too, the welcome accorded to a future lord would have been no less hearty. But who was to be glad of this poor waif, though his beauty would have done honor to a royal cradle?

Stay! there was one,—Désirée. From the moment of his birth, she was mother, nurse, worshipper, slave, all in one.

There are women and women. All are possessed by one of two instincts,—the instinct of maternal love or the love of the man. You will rarely, if ever, see the two go together: one will far outbalance the other. With some women, the man they love occupies their hearts to the exclusion of all else; they may be fond mothers, but they would sacrifice cheerfully every child they possess, rather than the man who holds their heart. And there are women so absorbed in their offspring that the husband is a mere accessory of the situation: his domestic comfort and happiness must invariably go to the wall if it comes into collision with the children's *bien-être*.

If I say that Viva was a woman of the former type, I would not thereby imply for an instant that she was wanting in any tenderness to the little creature who owed its life to her. But, instead of his being to her the consolation, the all-absorbing interest, that he would have been to some women in her position, he was a source of remorse and misery; and there were days when she could scarcely even endure to see him. But, having Désirée, little Bertie lacked nothing.

When Alsager looked at the lovely little fellow, with his glorious eyes, and downy, golden head, a pang smote him as he thought that, even if the duke died to-morrow, this child could never be heir to Ryvendale.

They could not tell each other the grievous thoughts that were in their hearts, but there was a temporary renewal of Alsager's tenderness to Viva: he was more with her than he had been of late. So, for a short space, she, poor soul! grew happier again, since her lord, who was the sole arbiter of her joy and sorrow, deigned graciously to hold out the sceptre to her. Now and then he brought one or two friends home with him, and the experiment was very successful. Taking their cue from Alsager, whose good taste was unimpeachable, they

treated Viva with, if anything, more deference than they would have done had she been actually Lady Ryvendale.

When Alsager saw the impression she made upon his friends, some of the old pride and love of her came creeping back to his heart. Where is the man whose opinion of a woman is not enhanced by knowing that other men envy him the possession of her? It had always been his pleasure that she should dress beautifully as in the old days, and she was wont to study her toilets more carefully to satisfy his eye than she had been formerly to win imperial approval.

A reflex of the old vivacity came to her: her lovely eyes shone with something of the old brilliancy, her sweet mouth curved in smiles; and men, seeing her, wondered no more at what women called "Lord Ryvendale's *extraordinary infatuation.*"

One man, after staying two days at Viva's house, was weak enough to say to his wife, the leader of a certain fast set, a lady distinguished for the aplomb with which she balanced herself on the tight-rope of society's opinion,—

"Gwen, you cannot imagine what a charming creature that poor duchess is! She is the most refined, delicate-minded woman I ever met. I should think it so awfully good and kind of you if you would go with me some day to see her. She does not seem ever to see a woman."

He speaks timidly and humbly: well he knows how enormous a request he is making. Lady Gwen's eyes positively lighten.

"*I!* go and see *that creature!* Are you mad, George?" And she swings out of the room, giving a sweep to her trailing velvet, as though it had even then suffered the horrible contamination of brushing against an improper person.

"George" glares at the door which is in the act of closing upon Lady Gwen, and gives utterance to a remark her ladyship would scarcely have cared to hear.

Among other visitors to The Beeches comes Lord Fairholme, Alsager's second in the duel. And when he has been once, he comes again often, and makes himself the child of the house. He is a favorite with every one: there is something irresistibly winning in his handsome young face, in his gay, bright manner. He has the rare art, most especially rare in young men, of making himself thoroughly at home without ever

taking a liberty or forgetting his good breeding. Viva, who never had a brother, thinks she would have liked such a one: she is glad to have him with her: no one can console her for Alsager's absence, but she is not so dull or unhappy when Lord Fairholme bears her company.

Though he comes so very, very often, no suspicion enters Lord Ryvendale's breast. He has that feeling of perfect security in Viva that augurs badly for a woman who demands a passionate, intense love. And George Fairholme never seems serious; he is always in a bright, joyous mood, making fun of some one or something. Among the many eyes that are constantly upon him and Viva, there is but one pair that sees anything written behind the gay insouciance that masks the young lord's face. The eyes are those of Désirée, but they tell what she sees to her own heart alone, and her heart keeps her secrets loyally.

August has come. This year, Lord Ryvendale is going grouse-shooting. He has asked Viva's permission to accept two or three pressing invitations, and, seeing how his heart is set on it, she dares not say him nay.

She is sitting yet in the place where he left her. He has gone off in the highest spirits, like a boy who is leaving school for the holidays. So she thinks, her throat and breast torn with choking sobs. He can live without her, nay, better without than with her; but she,—how can she bear the agony of a month's absence from him? She almost wonders how she could let him go,—why she did not fall on her knees and entreat him, with all the passionate fervor she is mistress of, to give up this Scotch trip. She is in the garden, away from all curious eyes: her slender frame is convulsed with grief: if he were lying dead before her, she could scarcely feel a more awful agony of desolation. He has not only left her, but left her gladly, willingly, with a smile on his face, a jocund ring in his voice, as he bade her "good-by," though *her* eyelids were heavy with tears, though *her* mouth quivered with suppressed sobs.

There comes across the grass towards her a swift step. Some one stands still, and is witness of her sobs and tears, as though he had the right to be there, as if there were no delicacy in intruding upon such sorrow. But Viva is absorbed in her grief: her handkerchief is pressed to her eyes: she knows

nothing of this ill-judged intrusion. A moment later, a hand is laid on hers, and she starts violently at meeting the gaze of Lord Fairholme. For the moment, she does not notice the altered expression of the handsome, boyish face; she is too much occupied in trying to repress her own agitation to remark his.

"I am feeling a little upset—the heat of the weather——" she stammers feebly.

"Oh, no!" he answers, quickly; "it is not that. You are broken-hearted because Ryvendale has gone. How *could* he leave you?"

Lord Fairholme has taken both her hands, and is looking earnestly at her fair, grievous face, and she, seeing nothing in his action but a desire to console her, leaves them in his. His face works uneasily for a moment; then he speaks in hot, eager haste.

"Duchess," he begins, and at the sound of that so long unfamiliar address, Viva draws her hands sharply from his clasp. "Have you never guessed," he goes on, "why I have been here morning, noon, and night for the last two months, why I have given up all my engagements, everything I used to care for, just for the pleasure of following you about like your dog? Because I love you—no! stay! you *shall not* go until you have heard me! I have seen dozens of women whom it was the fashion to praise and admire, but I never saw one like you. Do you think I could go away and leave you quite comfortably and gladly as Ryvendale has done to-day? Do you think that if I had you I could flirt and talk with other women as he does? And I! oh, I swear to you by every oath under heaven that is sacred, if you will trust yourself to me, I will be faithful to you all my life, and that when the duke dies I will marry you the moment you are free."

Viva feels as though rooted to the spot,—chained by the influence of some horrible nightmare. Never, until this moment, it seems to her, has she realized the full shame and horror of her position.

This, then, is how Lord Ryvendale's friends think of her,—even this boy, whom she had come to look upon as a brother!

Still Lord Fairholme pours forth his eager, passionate protestations, and she, with a stony, death-like feeling at her heart, must hear him.

He has finished at last, and is waiting breathlessly for her answer.

She does not look at him: her eyes are cast down, her fingers pluck feebly at her dress.

"It is quite right that I should know what I am, and what men think of me," she says, at last, in a low broken voice, "but I hardly thought it would come from you."

"What do you mean?" he cries. "Can I do more than offer my whole life to you?"

Has she not heard impassioned vows before?—they are but words of empty sound in her ears.

"Will you leave me now, Lord Fairholme?" she says.

There is no anger in her voice or heart: she is too utterly crushed for that.

Then the young fellow goes on his knees to her, and entreats her forgiveness, begs her humbly to try to forget his madness, to restore him to his old place in her favor. She scarcely answers him by a word. She feels as though all soul and spirit have gone from her: she has no strength to wage a war of words.

And when at last he leaves her, Lord Fairholme does not altogether believe his case to be desperate; he does not realize that the very quietness which seems a hopeful augury to him is the outcome of a fixed resolve never to see his face or hear his voice willingly again.

She sits where he left her until the twilight creeps on. A kind of apathy has fallen upon her. It is with the mind as with the body: when the agony becomes unbearable, insensibility ensues. Désirée, coming anxiously in search of her mistress, finds her sitting with a stony, vacant face. A heavy dew is falling, and she is but thinly clad.

"Ah, miladi, miladi!" cries the faithful girl, "what an imprudence!"

Viva rises and shivers.

"It is cold," she murmurs, taking the way towards the house.

"Has miladi forgotten how the doctor warned her against a chill?" asks Désirée, anxiously.

"What does it matter?" mutters Viva, wearily.

"But it matters everything," asserts Désirée, stoutly. "What is to become of the little angel up there?" pointing to

the nursery windows. "Miladi must be of good heart. Do but come and see the darling lying asleep! Do but come!" she urges.

"No, no," Viva answers, in a low, agitated voice: "do not ask me, Désirée!" Her look is so strange that the girl is almost frightened.

---

## CHAPTER XXII.

### LOVE GROWS AWEARY.

For some days after this, Viva is confined to her room with a severe cold and cough. Lord Fairholme comes every day, and angrily disbelieves the excuse that denies her to him: he writes her a long, impassioned letter, entreating her to pardon his imprudence, and swearing never to repeat it. He insists on seeing Désirée, and intrusts his letter to her, saying that he will await Lady Ryvendale's answer in the garden. He takes his way to the very spot where he last saw her, and sits there, moody and miserable, thinking over the happy days he has spent at The Beeches, and cursing his own folly for having put an end to them. But all that he said he had meant most sincerely: his whole heart is Viva's; he thought it would be an easy task to be faithful and to feel undiminished love for her all his life through; he wondered how Alsager could leave her, just as Alsager had wondered, in his time, at the duke's indifference and neglect of her. Half an hour, that seemed half a century, elapsed, before he saw Désirée's trim figure come with measured steps towards him across the sward. He goes eagerly to meet her. As she gives him a letter, he tries to put a bank-note into her hand.

Désirée draws herself up and looks the young lord full in the face with her clear eyes.

"I beg your pardon, milord. I do not understand." And, confused and blushing, he is forced to crumple up the note and thrust it back into his pocket.

He takes the letter (it is a thick one), and returns to his seat. His fingers tremble, his heart beats violently, as he tears

it open. There is his own letter, and, besides that, only a few words on a slip of paper:

"It is quite true that I am ill and confined to my room, but, were such not the case, nothing would induce me to see you. Never, never will I willingly see or speak with you again. Desist, I beg you, from these persecutions, which can serve no good purpose for you, and which only make me more wretched than I already am."

George Fairholme thinks his heart is broken. Hot tears come to his eyes: he dashes them away with impatient anger: his life is spoiled: there is nothing left to him worth having. He has serious thoughts of blowing his brains out, and goes so far as to take his revolver out of the case and examine it when he reaches his rooms. But he puts it safely away again, and the next evening finds him *en route* for Scotland.

A month's striding over heather all day and talking to pretty women half the night goes far towards healing his broken heart. The mysterious passion at which he darkly hints, in confidence, to sympathizing fair ones, gives him a fresh interest in their eyes and a considerable sense of importance in his own. So young, and to have been already the victim of a *grande passion!*—one, too, whose concomitant circumstances can only be dimly and darkly hinted at!

George's tender-hearted fair ones, who would have flouted the real Viva with open scorn, are deeply interested in the thought of some mysterious and lovely creature, the victim of romantic but most unhappy circumstances, who, but for the perverseness of Fate, might have crowned his life with a beatitude undreamed of in the hollow world.

And whilst Lord Ryvendale is thoroughly enjoying his absence from her, and young Fairholme is deriving considerable comfort from talking about her, Viva is passing through a time of unbearable misery. She cannot even go out of doors: the weather is unfavorable, and her cough shows no signs of yielding to treatment. She has no heart to read; she was never very fond of work; and her eyes burn and smart so from the perpetual rain of her tears that either would be a painful task. She can only count the days and hours, and think. And what are her thoughts? At last the Erinnyes are awake; at last they have brought their pitiless lashes to scourge her with; at last she *knows* that she has

sinned,—that misery in this life, and eternal perdition in the next, are all she has to look for.

Yet she could have endured all cheerfully, she tells herself, but for the cruel knowledge that Alsager's love for her is waning, that indeed it is all but gone. Lord Fairholme's words rankled like poisoned arrows in her breast: "Do you think I could go away and leave you quite comfortably and gladly as Ryvendale has done? Do you think if I had you I could talk and flirt with other women as he does?"

Her heart is filled with maddening jealousy: it is an old failing of hers, poor soul! as we know. No doubt there were pretty, charming women staying in the house with him,—women who could easily be charming because their hearts were not broken, nor their lives spoiled, because they had not hung all their future upon the love of one man, nor had their natural gayety drowned by remorse and shame. Remorse and shame! Yes! both have come and taken up their dwelling in her heart now,—remorse, since Alsager could leave her so blithely,—shame, since Lord Fairholme had dared to inflict so deadly an insult on her. How she longed for the consolations of religion! how her heart, that had been rebellious first, and ashamed afterwards, yearned to pour itself out in utter abasement and humiliation before her outraged God! but that consolation was impossible. How could she entreat forgiveness for a sin that she could die rather than relinquish? Oh, he might abandon her, might cease to care for her, but she! ah, it seemed to her that no power, human or divine, could tear her from his arms unless he pushed her from them.

She looked eagerly for his letters, but somehow, when they came and she had read them, her heart felt sadder and colder than before. They were kind enough, but they lacked the passionate tone of endearment that had made his letters so dear in former absences. They were short, but they might have been shorter still and yet given her far more pleasure. If he had only said, "My darling, you cannot think how I miss you; I am longing to see your dear face again," the brevity would have needed no apology; but he religiously chronicled the bags he made, and never failed to add that the party was a very cheery one.

For the first time in her life, she began to feel bitter against him,—to resent his being happy whilst she was so unutterably

wretched: she tortured herself with imagining that he was growing indifferent to her because some other woman was usurping her place in his heart.

Sleep began once more to forsake her eyelids: if her days were miserable, her nights were torment. She implored her doctor to give her narcotics, and he, seeing how terribly deranged was her nervous system, reluctantly complied. Plenty of fresh air and exercise,—that is what he would have liked to prescribe, but the patient could not follow the prescription. The chill she took on the evening of Lord Ryvendale's departure seemed to have gained a firm hold upon her, and she was so weak and oppressed by lassitude that any exertion was almost impossible. She had fallen into such a nervous, dejected state that she could scarcely speak without tears. She never went down-stairs to lunch or dinner, but was served by Désirée in her boudoir, and all the time she ate she cried too, and nothing her devoted handmaid could say had any power to cheer her.

At last the month went by: the day of Alsager's return arrived. Viva was full of restless excitement: morbid apprehensions overcame her that some accident would happen to him, or that some unforeseen event would delay his coming. "And if so," she says wildly to herself, "I shall die!"

She looks at herself in the glass, and thinks, "How haggard and white I have grown! he will hardly know me again!" She has her hair dressed in the way he likes best; she puts on her prettiest and most becoming gown; she has resolved to deck her face with smiles to greet him. She will say nothing of all the torments she has endured in his absence. Then she goes to await him with feverish impatience in her boudoir.

At last, at last, the sound of wheels falls on her eager ear. A moment more, she hears his voice asking for her, and then —then she is in his arms. But where are the smiles, the gay greeting words that she has conned so arduously for the occasion? Her tense nerves have given way: no single word issues from her lips: she is in an agony of sobs and tears: all her frame is shaken by a very hurricane of passionate emotion.

This is hardly a reception that a man would appreciate, a man who has returned home in a very cheerful frame of mind, and who is besides exceedingly tired and hungry, and longing

for his dinner. Still, Alsager consoles her with what grace he may.

"You must never, never leave me again," she sobs. "If you do, I shall die."

Now, as Alsager has been exercising his mind considerably to think how he shall best break it to her that he wants to go down to Ryvendale next week, this entreaty is rather vexatious.

"Come, dear," he says, gently disengaging himself from her arms, "don't let me see these tears, or I shall think you are not glad to see me back. I am as hungry as a hunter. Dry your eyes, and let me go and dress."

Since the one thing in the world that Viva desires is his presence, and he is here safe and well, why is she not intensely, madly happy? Poor soul! she could not tell you what is lacking to her happiness,—what gulf seems to yawn between her and Alsager, though she can stretch out her hand and touch him; only she knows there is something which, a sad presentiment tells her, she will never more be able to overcome.

At dinner her cheerfulness revives: she is able to talk and smile. After the thirty desolate pretences of dinner that she has gone through, it is delightful to have his pleasant face opposite her once more, and to hear his cheery tones. But for his part, when he has time to look at her carefully, Alsager is shocked to see the change in Viva. She has grown so pale, so thin, and her eyes have such a hollow look, and such dark shadows underneath them. He does not like the sound of her cough. A day or two later, he sends for a physician to hold a consultation with her own doctor. Both are of opinion that she requires a thorough change, and that the most desirable thing for her would be to winter in the South of France. Lord Ryvendale readily falls into their views. He will take her to her destination, fetch her again, and visit her once or twice whilst there. Spend another whole winter abroad himself, he cannot and will not, and this arrangement will give him plenty of time to pay some of the pleasant shooting-visits, invitations for which have poured in upon him lately. Society is beginning to forget his "entanglement," or to think she is performing an act of charity in trying to wean him from it.

When the scheme is broached to Viva, and she understands that Alsager does not intend remaining with her, she negatives

it with the utmost decision. She has suffered too keenly from his late absence to put herself willingly in the way of being parted from him for a longer time. Alsager is irritated by her persistency in refusing to fall in with his views, and she is cut to the heart to see how eagerly he advocates a plan that will separate him from her.

Lord Ryvendale gives up his project of going to his own place, and takes Viva away for change of air, but he is scarcely at much pains to conceal from her that he is bored and disappointed. So, altogether, the change is not productive of very much benefit to her. Time was when she believed that his presence alone was sufficient to insure her happiness. Alas! poor Viva! she is coming to learn, as so many of her sex have done before her, that it is possible to be more unhappy in the company of the man you love than away from him,—when he begins to seem bored, when he turns listlessly if not impatiently from your timid endearments, when he no longer responds to them, or only automatically and without heart!

Alsager was no longer affected by the sight of Viva's tears; rather they made him feel cold and hard towards her, and she would wonder, dumbly, in her stricken heart, how he could be witness of her agony and seem to have no pity for her. Men and women are often bitterly aggrieved with each other, and it is difficult to apportion the blame justly. A man is well and strong, has no aches or pains, can come and go as he lists, has sport to amuse him, plenty of air and exercise, an excellent appetite: how is it to be supposed he can enter into the feelings of a delicate, suffering woman who has nothing to take her out of herself, and infinite leisure and an infinite capacity for brooding over the troubles of her life?

The man thinks, irritably, "Surely this woman is the most exacting and worrying creature that ever drew the breath of life! I have surrounded her with every comfort, she has only to express a wish, and I gratify it, and, instead of smiling and being pleasant to me, I have nothing but her eternal complaints, tears, and reproaches. If she has bad health, it is not my fault: lots of other women are in the same boat, only they bear it better. Why does she not exert herself, and get up early, and go for a good walk, instead of moping and dawdling about the house all day?" And the woman thinks, "He has

everything to make him happy; he can amuse himself, and eat, and sleep; and he sees how ill and wretched I am, and, instead of being kind and sympathizing and sorry for me, he looks bored to death, just if I were only ill to annoy him, and would not give anything in the world to be strong and well and in good spirits!"

No one better understood what tact meant than Viva; no woman was ever more thoroughly conscious of the necessity of trying to keep a man amused and cheerful if you wish to retain his affection; but her knowledge only served to increase her self-torment, since she was so oppressed with sadness that to be bright and amusing was no longer possible to her. If he would only help her! but no! he seemed to have fallen into a state of utter weariness and boredom: he rarely spoke, and, if he did, there was an inflection in his voice that brought the ready tears to her eyes.

Viva saw acutely what she ought to do if she meant to retain a vestige of power over Lord Ryvendale. She ought to let him come and go as he liked,—ought even to suggest short absences to him, and, when he returned, greet him with glad looks and bright smiles that he might feel what a pleasant thing it was to come home. She knew it, and yet *she could not* bring herself to act upon it. The day after their return home, Alsager said,—

"I think it might be enlivening to have a little company besides our own. I wonder what on earth has become of that boy Fairholme? I will write and ask him what he means by neglecting us in this shameful manner."

The swift color rushes to Viva's cheeks.

"No," she says, hurriedly: "do not ask him."

Alsager looks up at her and sees the tell-tale color in her cheeks.

"Why?" he asks.

"I do not want him. I do not care for him."

"And yet," remarks Alsager, eying her narrowly, "you could not have enough of him at one time. I think you are very capricious."

"Capricious!" And she looks up at him with flashing eyes.

A light seems to dawn upon Lord Ryvendale.

"You don't mean to say that boy has had the impudence

to make love to you," he says, smiling as though the idea were an excellent joke.

Viva looks at him with a stupefied air. He can treat what seems the deadliest insult to her as a jest, a matter to provoke mirth!

"It is nothing to you, I suppose," she cries, indignantly, with hot tears flashing in her eyes. "Perhaps you, too, think I am not entitled to men's respect!"

It is the first time that she has ever alluded to her own position. Alsager looks at her, half surprised, half shocked.

"Of course," he says, coldly, "if Fairholme has insulted you, it will be my business to demand reparation of him."

"I did not say so; I did not mean it," utters Viva, eagerly, a horrible memory of the duel coming back to her. "I am tired of him; that is all. I do not care to have men here. You can see them in London, and—and—if you wish it, go to Ryvendale for a few days; I shall not mind; I shall not be dull."

Alsager needs no second invitation. The next day he starts for Ryvendale, and from that time his visits to the Court assume a certain degree of regularity: it is pleasant to receive the warm, smiling welcome of his sister-in-law, and to see the evident satisfaction of his dependants at sight of him. Every time he returns to The Beeches, it seems duller, more oppressive. He cannot tell, it never occurs to him to reflect, what Viva suffers in his absence. She has lost the graces and charms that first won his heart; she is now only a sad-eyed, unhappy woman. So he thinks, and knows not that in his keeping is the enchanter's wand that could bring back the smile to her lips, the fair faint color to her cheeks, the brilliancy to her beautiful eyes: it is he who is changed, not she. If he loved her as he did once, if he still could lavish upon her the endearments prompted by a great and sincere passion, if his heart were still bound up in her, as hers is in him, she would still be the same lovely, gracious woman that in the old days all men found fair. Love and happiness can beautify a plain woman: how much more one so richly endowed by nature as Viva! She was a woman bound to make the most charming wife to a man who began by loving and appreciating her. Had she been Alsager's lawful wife, and mistress of her proper position in society, she would have been a queen and leader

among the fair and gay, and he would have been proud of her, and in all probability would have remained devoted to her. But now she has no sphere: she has sinned, and yet she is modest and delicate-minded. She cannot flaunt her shame and make the best of a false position. If she would have consented to go everywhere with Alsager, to show herself in public with him, to enjoy the advantages that she might still have reaped from his wealth and position, she might have avoided the dreariness of her present life and retained his affection, whilst forfeiting, perhaps, some small share of his esteem. But a life like that would have killed Viva, who was proud and sensitive to the last degree. To live in the world and yet not to be of it,—to meet the scornful eyes of haughty dames who would have been but too proud to know the Duchesse de Lallière in past times,—nothing could have compensated her for that. She is the strange anomaly, a woman who has left the paths of virtue and who yet would fain be virtuous.

Alsager is frequently away now, and it has come to this, that Viva no longer questions his right to come and go as he pleases. Society has taken him back to her bosom: she assumes that he is weary of his sin, and therefore to be received and petted and forgiven. And he has never offended her by parading "that horrid woman" before her eyes: he always kept her decently in the background.

It is at this stage matters have arrived when Lord Ryvendale sees for the first time that "fair saint" who now occupies so large a portion of his thoughts. We may be quite sure that he has never mentioned the existence of the rector's daughters to Viva. But she has remarked the growing frequency of his visits to Ryvendale, and, believing that it is the place which attracts him, has been nerving herself to a supreme effort.

It is the day after his return from the Court, when Lady Ryvendale had expressed herself so strongly about his departure.

Viva, whose mind has been filled with her project for several days, goes to Lord Ryvendale's chair, as he sits reading the paper, and, kneeling down by him, puts both her hands on his arm.

"Alsager!" she says, in a low, tremulous voice.

"Well?" he answers, indifferently, not even turning to look at her.

"I want to say something very serious to you," she pleads, gently drawing the paper away.

He looks at her: there is scant sympathy in his eyes. "Some new complaint, I suppose," he thinks, with weary disgust.

She reads the look, but says to herself, with a beating heart, "When he hears, he will think differently."

"I have been thinking," she begins, "that you have seemed to care a great deal about Ryvendale lately, that you are often there, and——"

"Good heavens!" Alsager says to himself, uneasily, "can she have heard anything?"

"And," proceeds Viva, her voice growing still more tremulous—"and things seem different to me from what they did. There is only one thing in life I think of or care for now, and that is you."

No response. He does not press the hand that lies on his; no softness comes into his eyes.

"Well," she goes on, hurriedly, "I have been thinking it over lately; it has kept me awake at night, and I am resolved —I have no pride, no dignity to hurt now; and, though I have shut my eyes to it all this time, I know you ought to be there, I know it would make me happier—I—I have resolved to sacrifice my feelings, and for your sake I am willing and ready to go and live at Ryvendale."

She looks up in his face, smiling through her tears, waiting for him to take her in his arms and thank her, with a thousand kisses, for yielding to what she believes to be his most ardent desire. But what is this? he is dumb; he stares at her with a look of stony horror.

"Well?" she cries, breathlessly, aghast at his silence and his look.

"It is impossible!" he says, abruptly, starting to his feet. In another moment he is gone, and Viva sits there alone, bewildered, stupefied.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ALSAGER'S UNWORTHY PLEA.

LORD RYVENDALE paces his room with an unquiet mind. What on earth should have put this idea into her head?—above all things now, when it has become a sheer impossibility? It was quite true that he had urged, nay, entreated Viva, once upon a time, to make her home at Ryvendale; but then she had seen, very properly, that it would not be the right thing, and now that he wants to stand well with the county, that he is anxious to be looked up to and respected, she must take it into her head to spoil all his plans and hopes! Oh, the cursed perversity of women! Perhaps she suspects something, and jealousy prompts her to go to Ryvendale to be a spy upon his actions. But she shall not, come what may! on that he is resolved. Oh, what a fool he was to bind himself with these chains,—chains that he sees no way of freeing himself from! He can scarcely realize now that he once loved her so passionately, so devotedly, that no sacrifice would have seemed too great to make for her sake. Until this moment, he has shrunk from acknowledging to himself that he no longer loves her, but now he says it openly and boldly: he not only confesses, but asseverates to himself that he has made a fatal mistake. Then his thoughts travel to Osyth. What! after he has proclaimed his regret for his sin and his weariness of it, take his mistress openly and shamelessly to live in sight of her and all the neighborhood! turn Gertrude out to make room for one whom she looks upon with abhorrence?

Ah! let not a woman dream that, whatever the world's judgment may be, the man for whom she has sinned will always have tender and pitiful thoughts of her, will always find her love for him sufficient excuse for her frailty. She has no more merciless judge than the man who is weary of her.

But what reason shall he give her? what excuse shall he make? Alsager racks his brain for an answer to these questions. He is not called upon for any: Viva, wounded to the heart, alludes no more to the subject. For the first time in her life she assumes a cold demeanor towards him, and answers him only by monosyllables.

The day following, Lord Ryvendale goes away without wishing her good-by. He leaves the following note:

"DEAR VIVA,—

"As you are in a fair way to succeed in making this place a hell to me, and as my presence seems to cause you nothing but unhappiness, I think it better, for both our sakes, to absent myself until such time as we can meet upon more agreeable terms. I am not aware of having failed in any way in consideration for you. With regard to your proposal to live at Ryvendale, the same objections which you very sensibly urged when I wished you to make your home there still exist, and you have no right to blame me for being convinced by your own arguments. You would be exposed to a thousand mortifications, and I should be making enemies of the very people I am most anxious to conciliate by seeming to defy the opinion of the county. I shall most likely go down to Ryvendale to-morrow."

As Viva finishes the letter, an icy pain settles at her heart. She reads it through, rapidly the first time, then twice, thrice, slowly, as though she would learn its cruel words by heart Then she puts it down quietly on the table and sits motionless, staring blankly into space. She scarcely knows what she feels: there is only a dim consciousness of some great woe having befallen her: it is the pang that mortals suffer when hope dies in their hearts a sudden and violent death. All day long she moves about mechanically, saying every now and then to herself, in a low, tremulous voice, as though she were speaking to some other person, "You must be calm: you must not cry. Why should you be unhappy? You ought to have expected this all along."

In the afternoon she sends for her child, and bids the nurse leave him with her. The little fellow crows with delight: he plays with the jewels on her fingers; he is imperturbably happy

and good-tempered; no prescience of shame burdens him; he lifts his bonnie head proudly and tosses his golden curls; he runs along the floor, helping himself by the chairs, and grasping imperiously at whatever pleases his fancy. Viva follows him with her eyes, but in them there dwells none of the pride that happy mothers feel. She is saying to herself,—

"Poor little one! you have no father, and, when you grow old enough, you will despise and hate your mother."

By a strong effort she maintains her calmness all through the afternoon and evening, until she is alone for the night. Then, once more, she reads that cruel letter through, and, throwing herself into a chair, gives vent to all the pent-up anguish of the day.

This is what she has bartered her soul for! this is her punishment! this is God's vengeance upon her! All her past comes back to her,—the past that she has resolutely banished from her thoughts for years. She thinks once more of her husband: oh, how small a thing his infidelity seems, compared with Alsager's desertion of her! Then she had friends, position, resources; now she has only grief and shame for company. She remembers that but for Alsager she might still be living in the world, loved, admired, respected, but he has bereft her of all, and in his turn is weary of her. A horrible suspicion creeps into her heart. Is there some other woman whom he loves?—some one he would fain see mistress of Ryvendale? has he grown indifferent to her because another has usurped her place in his love? At this thought her heart stands still.

During the time that Viva is suffering her martyrdom, Lord Ryvendale is amusing himself extremely well, and has banished all thought of her. If a momentary sting of self-reproach assails him, he drives it rapidly away, saying to himself, "She brought it upon herself. She ought to know that it is impossible for her to go to Ryvendale. I should have thought she had more delicacy than to pain me by making the suggestion."

Alsager, on his arrival in town, has gone straight to the house of a very pretty woman whose acquaintance he has recently made. He has never yet failed to be pleasing in the eyes of a woman whose good will he desired, and though this sprightly dame differs essentially from what Viva was, and ten times more so from what Osyth is, his versatile heart can

find all variations of the *beau sexe* charming in turn, and in his present mood no one is more adapted for putting unpleasant thoughts out of his head than Mrs. Fairstar.

She is at home, and pays him the compliment of receiving him in her boudoir. It is a very pretty room, not one of those dim, mysterious, rose-shaded paradises that women in novels always affect, and not unfrequently out of them. Mrs. Fairstar likes light as much as a man does, and her pretty face will bear the sun's bold glances with perfect equanimity. Her boudoir is as cheerful as it is comfortable. She has been known to say, with a mischievous little laugh, "Women hardly ever come here in the daytime: you see, there is no place where they can get with their backs to the light."

"I am so delighted you have come," she says in greeting to Alsager, giving him the look of welcome that is so inexpressibly pleasing to a man when it comes from a pretty woman whom he admires. "I have been expecting you for days."

"Why did not some good fairy tell me?" he answers, gayly. "I should have been too delighted to come. As it is, I was a little diffident about calling, although you were kind enough to tell me that I might."

"Did you think I was not sincere?" says Mrs. Fairstar, flashing him a charming little *œillade*.

"How could I dare to hope that, surrounded by so many votaries, you would even remember my existence?" answers Alsager, perfectly aware that his pretty hostess means a flirtation, and thoroughly prepared to gratify her.

"Oh, when I take a *great* fancy to any one, I never forget him," says the fair one, ingenuously. The frankness of her speech is quite childlike at times.

"But how could I venture to think you *had* taken a fancy to me?" Alsager asks, tenderly.

"Did you not know it? Frank always says there is no mistake about my liking a man when I do; but husbands are privileged to say horrid, brutal things. Do you know why I like you? First, because people are always calling you a '*mauvais sujet*' (I adore a *mauvais sujet*), and secondly, because you look rather unhappy. Old Lady Starchflower wants to reform and marry you (I think she has you in her eye for one of her nieces), but I will protect you" (laughing). "Don't

get married!" (with a little, wry face): "it is a horrid thing to do. We poor women of course must: it is the only way we have of earning a comfortable living. But if I were a man, ah!" (with a great sigh), "I would not marry the prettiest woman that ever lived."

"And yet," returns Alsager, meaningly, "when one sees a charming and pretty woman, it is easy to understand the temptations matrimony throws in a man's way."

"Ah," says Mrs. Fairstar, with a gay laugh, "but how long does a woman remain charming and pretty to her husband? And, after all, what is the good of going on exercising your fascinations upon him after you have once caught him? You don't go on spearing your salmon when you have got him safe on the bank, do you? Besides, a husband would not appreciate it. If I were to try my powers of pleasing upon Frank now, he would probably tell me not to make a fool of myself."

"Is *Frank* so very unappreciative?" asks Lord Ryvendale, smiling.

"Not more so than most husbands, I suppose" (with a little *moue*). "But don't let us waste our time in talking about him."

"Do you not think," says Alsager, relapsing all of a sudden into seriousness, "that there are some happy marriages? After a time, a man gets weary of the world and its sham pleasures, and feels the want of solid ease and comfort. I confess, the thought of a sweet, amiable woman at the head of one's house has a certain charm for me."

In his heart he is picturing to himself Osyth holding her gentle sway at the Court, as once, long ago, he had pictured Viva.

"You?" retorts Mrs. Fairstar, arching her pretty brows; "you and domestic felicity? Oh, how tired you would get of it! You are not at all a man to waste your sweetness on the desert air. Fancy you a staid respectable country gentleman, taking an interest in short-horns and that sort of thing, and going in for all the dull details of bucolic life! No, my lord: that is not at all your *métier*."

"And what is my *métier*, pray?"

Mrs. Fairstar looks at him for a moment; then she gives a little sigh,—whether real or affected, it is impossible to decide.

"I will not tell you, though I know quite well," she says.

Lord Ryvendale embarks upon a very decided flirtation with his fair hostess; he dines with her, and joins her party at the theatre in the evening. Whilst Viva is shedding such bitter tears, he has almost forgotten her existence; under the influence of Mrs. Fairstar's fascinations, the thought even of Osyth is far from him.

Next morning he wakes with his mind in much such a state as his palate might be after a rich and unwholesome banquet. He thinks of Mrs. Fairstar with a sense rather of irritation than of pleasure; he says to himself that he has had enough of caring for other men's wives. Osyth's fair, serene face returns to him with fourfold charm: the thought of her brings repose to his irritated senses. He will go to Ryvendale this very day, in spite of his promise to ride with Mrs. Fairstar in the afternoon. So he despatches a note to the lady, pleading a sudden call into the country.

"He has gone to see some horrid woman," decides the fair one, angrily,—"no doubt the one who has inspired him with a desire for pastoral delights!"

Well she knows that, with a man like Alsager, business is a synonyme for pleasure: the most important affairs would have to go to the wall if it were a question between them and the woman he wanted to see.

Lord Ryvendale has been at the Court nearly a week, and the greater part of his time has been spent with Osyth. The plans for benefiting the poor which she suggested, and he, for her sake, is carrying out, afford him ample excuse for being in her society, and every day makes her more dear, more desirable in his eyes. The thought of Viva hardly restrains him now: he has begun to say to himself that these connections must come to an end at some time or other, and that now there is so little affection left between them (poor Viva!), a separation is almost inevitable.

*Of course* he will do not only what is right, but he will make the handsomest provision for her and her child: she shall live precisely in the same style that she does now. It will be rather an inconvenience to divert so much of his income, especially if he should have children; but the follies of

youth have generally to be paid dearly for. If there were any chance of the duke dying, he would feel it his duty to marry Viva, even though his affection for her is at so low an ebb; but the duke will live for the next twenty or thirty years, barring accidents.

So Alsager made his plans and rejoiced in them. He, so versed in the knowledge of women's hearts, never doubted for a single moment what Osyth's answer would be when he asked her to be his wife. He was growing eager and impatient to have the matter settled; he wanted to feel the security that she would be his, even though some time must elapse before matters could be arranged and he would be free to make her actually his wife.

To-night the rector and his daughters are to dine at the Court. Alsager has planned to himself how, as on that other night, they will go into the gardens together, how he will tell her of his love and of his hopes for the future, and his heart beats fast as already he seems to hear the faint consenting whisper of her dear voice.

Osyth, who is as free from vanity as it is possible for one of her sex to be, somehow on this evening is vexed with a particular anxiety about her appearance. For the first time in her life, she would fain be fairer than she is. She turns from the glass with a little sigh; her own image has already vanished from her eyes, and she sees the face which to her is the handsomest in the world, and the eyes that possess so unspeakable a charm. Only the thought of being in his presence sends a flutter to the heart that is wont to beat so evenly and calmly. When she prays now, she compels herself to a tenfold fervor and devotion, for fear lest her love of His creature should offend her Creator. She dares not speculate whether Lord Ryvendale cares for her: his tender manner, his glances that thrill her to the very soul, may be only ways such as the men of his world use to women.

It is just such a night as that eventful one of her first dinner at the Court. To Riette, the party is a less gay and pleasant one, but there is nothing lacking to Osyth's happiness. Lord Ryvendale's eyes seek her more often; his voice has a tender modulation in speaking to her, and her gentle soul is flooded with a new-found happiness. She scarcely knows how it is that again she finds herself in the garden

with him, in the same place where he made his impetuous and bitter confession to her. But he is not like the same man to-night; there is no weary discontent in his words or manner; rather there seems a kind of exultation only half repressed. He has banished his doubts, lulled his conscience to sleep: once again his own will is a law to him. The joy of all men who have a fair new love is his, with the desire and delight before him of wresting from her sweet lips the confession that he, too, is dear to her. He scarcely speaks until he has brought her to the spot which has been so strongly associated with her in his mind ever since that first talk with her; but the silence causes no embarrassment to either. An enchantment has fallen upon them in the hush of the splendid night; to Osyth it no longer seems the common "work-a-day" world; even Alsager, to whom the only novelty of the situation is that his love has a fresh object, feels all his veins stirred to pleasure by the exceeding fairness of his surroundings.

Osyth is sitting in the self-same spot, looking at the scene to which her happiness lends new beauty. Alsager is not leaning against the broad tree-trunk to-night; he is sitting beside her. All at once he takes her hand in his.

"My darling!"

A thrill goes through Osyth's heart,—a thrill of mingled joy and terror. In this moment a new realm is opened to her, in which the passionate delights and woes of love stand revealed. She understands, in this one instant of time, more of the joys and sufferings of struggling humanity than all her life before has taught her: she no longer stands on her pedestal of saintship, calm, unruffled, though compassionate; but she too is plunged into the wide, wild sea—another victim of the common lot.

In the bright moonlight, Alsager can see the waves of color that flood her throat and brow, he feels the trembling of her little, prisoned hand, almost he can hear the wild beating of her heart.

A smile plays on his lips; there is no passion or eagerness in his eyes,—only a deep, calm content.

Osyth essays feebly to withdraw her hand.

"Nay," he says, tenderly, "will not you let me keep it?" And he half loosens his clasp, that she may see he will not

hold it by force if it displease her. She leaves it in his, and again his fingers clasp firmly over it. Then, very gently, he possesses himself of her other hand.

"Look at me, sweet," he whispers. "I want to read what your eyes are saying."

For a moment she essays to turn them to his, but something she reads there makes her avert them again. Alsager's eyes are never wont to say less than they mean, and Osyth is not the first woman who has been embarrassed by their gaze.

"Have you not known all along how it was going to be?" he says, gently, still holding her hands. "I swear to you that almost before I saw your face, when I had only a glimpse of a devout, kneeling figure, something stirred my heart, and after I had only talked to you for those few minutes in the rectory garden, I came home and thought of you all the livelong day afterwards. And every time that I have seen you since, my love for you has grown and increased, and now, oh, my darling! I should hate the thought of life without you! I have only one desire in the world, and that is to make you mine."

He has dropped his calm voice now, and is speaking with eager passion.

"Don't you remember our first talk, here in this very place? don't you remember how weary and miserable I was? how I was beginning to hate my life? But now everything is changed in me. It is your doing. I can look forward to a new and happy life, to being of some use in the world, if you will help me. Without you, I should sink back into a worse state than I was before. Say, darling, you will not let me do that?"

His words fall like sweetest music on Osyth's ear, and yet—yet she has a haunting thought of that other woman. He pauses. Words are struggling in her throat,—words she can not bring herself to speak. But, with a rapid intuition, he grasps her thought.

"You do not surely think," he utters, hastily, "that I would speak to you in this way unless I had irrevocably resolved to leave the past utterly, entirely behind me. It cannot, of course, be done all in a moment: some time must necessarily be occupied in—in——"

Lord Ryvendale pauses.

"What I want you to promise, my darling, is that when I *am* free you will be my own, sweet wife. And from this moment I swear to be as faithful to you as though you were already mine."

Still Osyth hesitates, though she would give the world to speak the answering words that her heart so clamorously dictates. What is it that holds her back?

For the first time, an ugly doubt shapes itself in Alsager's mind whether he has not been too sure of her. And, as she still yields him no answer, he makes this unworthy plea:

"Did you not urge me to forsake my sin? did you not hold out to me the hope of a nobler, better life? And now that you have only to stretch out your hand to save me, do you not care enough for me to do it?"

Osyth's doubts have vanished; nothing but her great love remains: the eager words are on her lips.

A discreet cough, at a little distance, startles both her and Alsager violently.

Lord Ryvendale looks up with the angry irritation that a man is wont to feel at such an interruption. Osyth suffers the burning shame that is the woman's fate on such occasions.

It is Fletcher, and he is the bearer of a telegram. Alsager tears it open, and reads,—

"Come at once. Bertie is dying."

He starts to his feet.

"The dog-cart at once. There is just time to catch the night train. Do not wait to pack anything!"

Fletcher vanishes. Alsager stands a moment irresolute. What shall he do? Shall he tell Osyth the truth! No! impossible.

"I must leave at once," he says, hurriedly: "a friend of mine is ill,—dying, perhaps. I will write to you. Good-by, my darling!"

And then, with a sudden impulse, he catches her to his heart, presses one long kiss upon her lips, and is gone.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### "UNRESPITED, UNPITIED, UNREPRIEVED."

FLETCHER goes to make preparations for Lord Ryvendale's departure burning with indignation. He is an honest fellow, Fletcher, not at all given to eavesdropping, but for once in his life he has played the spy. In his search for Lord Ryvendale, he caught a glimpse of a white gown, and a sudden thought came to him that he would see on what sort of terms his lordship and Miss Sartoris stood to each other. For some time past he had entertained suspicions that his master was playing his mistress false. Some of his devotion for Désirée is reflected upon her lady. He has been with them through all: was he not witness of his master's wild passion for the duchess, and of her grief and trouble after the duel? and has he not seen of late, with ever-growing indignation, how Lord Ryvendale has requited the poor lady's love and fidelity?

When he saw his master and Miss Sartoris sitting close together, he went up behind them, creeping stealthily from tree to tree, until he came to the shelter of a vast old chestnut trunk within five yards of where they sat. And, in the hush of the summer night, Lord Ryvendale's passionate invocation was borne audibly towards him.

That was enough: he retired some paces, and then coughed, and came ostentatiously and hurried forward.

His mind is made up: he will tell Désirée all he knows, and she shall be at liberty to repeat it to her mistress. It will cost him his place—well, let it! if it is the means of hindering the marriage Lord Ryvendale contemplates, and restoring him to Viva, he is prepared to make the sacrifice, and if it only hastens their separation, why, then he will stay with Désirée and her mistress and be of what help he can to them. Fletcher has a loyal and true heart, truer, more loyal by far

than that which beats in his master's breast: he is incapable of such treachery as Lord Ryvendale meditates.

As for Alsager, whilst the train whirls him along, he is a prey to conflicting feelings. He is very sorry about the boy, of whom he is really fond: had little Bertie been the heir to Ryvendale, he would have idolized him. And yet the thought will steal across him that, if the child died, it would be well. Since he has resolved on parting from Viva, there would be one link the less to break.

When he reached home, he found Viva kneeling by the child's bed. She had found the mother's heart that beats so strong and deep when its little one suffers. Whilst Bertie had been hale and well, he had only been her second thought; but now that he wanted her care, that he was struggling for every breath of life, all that great and wonderful tenderness that lies in the heart of a mother came up to shelter and enfold him. Her eyes were hollow and sunken: all night long she had spent by her child's bedside.

As Alsager entered, she looked up at him in a dumb agony, but neither rose nor spoke. His eyes were wet as he looked from that sorrowful face to the poor fevered cheeks of the little sufferer, who lay gasping for breath. He knelt down beside Viva, putting his arm round her and kissing her poor, pale face, but she only answered by a faint moan: even he could not comfort her now.

But, after all, the child did not die, and, as he recovered, Alsager's new-born sympathy and tenderness for Viva melted away, and he began to remember Osyth and to long to see and be with her again. He hinted to Viva that some important alterations he was having made at the Court required his personal supervision, but she implored him with such urgency not to go yet, lest Bertie should have a fresh attack, that it would have been positive brutality to leave her. And Alsager, though he could break a woman's heart, was incapable of a small brutality. Finding life at The Beeches intolerably dull, he went every day to London. It was at this time that Fletcher deemed it well to communicate his news to Désirée, leaving it to her to acquaint her mistress with Lord Ryvendale's treachery or not as she thought best. So one evening he asked her to walk with him in the grounds. Désirée demurred at first: she gave him but scant encouragement at the best of times:

perhaps it was on that account his love was so faithful and humble.

But when he told her, with an earnest face, that he had something to confide to her which nearly concerned her mistress, she hesitated no longer. Having gained her ear, Fletcher lost no time in telling all he knew. As for Désirée, she stood like one stunned, stupefied.

"Is it possible that there is in the world a man so base?" she cried, at last, putting her hand to her head. "Oh! poor lady! poor lady! Ah! and when your lord was so concerned for her because of M. le Duc! Why, M. le Duc behaved like an angel compared with him!" And Désirée glared at poor Fletcher, as though he were a partaker in his master's iniquity.

"It is a bad job," he uttered, ruefully. "I could never have believed it of him."

"Men are all, all, all bad," said Désirée, stamping her foot. "I hate them! Ah! never, never will I trust one!"

"Don't say that!" cried Fletcher, looking distressed. "Oh, Madamasel Désirée, there are one or two honest fellows going about the world as would be faithful to a woman if she gave them the chance."

"How do I know?" replied Désirée, hotly. "Who could have adored a woman more than *your* milord? who could have been so humble, so full of vows and promises! All men are like that: they would move heaven and earth to win a woman, and then, *la, la!* they are off after a fresh one. Oh, but may the next one, if he gets her, break his heart! I would give half my wages in candles to the Blessed Virgin for it."

"He is more likely to break hers," uttered Fletcher, in a melancholy tone. "There is something about him that does seem to take the ladies most unaccountably."

"It is his eyes," said Désirée. "The devil sits behind them and persuades women that his false heart is a true one. Have I not seen him ten thousand times look at miladi as if he could never enough tell her with them how much he loved her? Not lately, but in the old days. And since then, by little, little bits, he has been breaking her heart, and now he wants to kill her all at once. She will die of it; she will die," murmured Désirée, in a mournful, prophetic voice, tears streaming down her face.

She was silent for a moment, and Fletcher could find nothing to say, but hung his head as though he had connived at his master's treachery.

"No, no, no!" cried Désirée, at last, answering some thought of her own: "it shall not be. I will go to miladi; I will tell her all; she shall speak to him, and he will be confounded. Not to-night; to-night he is there; but to-morrow, when he is gone to London. He will go, of course, as always: when does he stay to make her happy, or to bring a smile into her poor, sad face? If she could believe it, poor miladi! she would be less unhappy without him; but a woman who loves never thinks so. And to say that in Paradise it was the woman who tempted the man! *Nenni!* it is the man ever who is the deceiver."

All night long Désirée lay awake, thinking how she could break this terrible news to her mistress. For a whole hour she knelt by little Bertie and wept and bemoaned him, but he slept the happy, innocent sleep of childhood, and knew and cared nothing for the scalding tears that were being shed for his sake.

Lord Ryvendale started earlier than usual the next morning. Viva was still in her room, waiting for Désirée to dress her: she had to wait sometimes now, when Bertie imperiously demanded the presence of his vassal: one attendant was not sufficient for his will and pleasure.

"Désirée," cries Viva, as she enters, "what is the matter with you?—you are ill!" And, indeed, the wonted look of comely health is strangely absent from the girl's face to-day.

Désirée's fingers tremble on the handle of the door; her mouth quivers; she has meant to be quite calm and collected, but, true to her sex, she bursts into bitter tears the moment she essays to speak.

"My poor Désirée," says Viva, in her kind, sympathetic voice, laying a hand upon the girl's shoulder, "what is it that distresses you?"

But Désirée, in her impulsive French way, only answers by throwing herself at the feet of her mistress and covering her hands with kisses.

"Oh, my poor mistress!" she gasps out, at last.

Viva sinks back into the chair from which she has hastily risen. With the proneness of poor mortality to fear the worst,

she is seized with a wild terror that something has befallen Alsager or her child.

"Is it Lord Ryvendale or Bertie?" she stammers, sick and white.

"Nothing ails them, miladi," sobs Désirée: "it is not that."

Viva looks at her with a stupefied air. Since *they* are well, what misfortune can call forth these tears, this violent demonstration of grief?

"Speak!" she says, at last, summoning up an imperative tone. "Why do you keep me in this suspense?"

"Ah," cries Désirée, "how shall I tell you, when I know that it will break your heart? Would rather that I should tell miladi an accident had happened to milord, than that I should have to say to her that he is untrue."

A ghastly pallor comes over Viva's face. Alsager unfaithful to her! To a woman in her situation, the infidelity of a lover is more cruel than that of a husband to a wife: it is a wrong unpardonable and without redress. But even yet she does not dream of the full signification Désirée's words hold.

"Miladi has never guessed why milord has gone so often lately to Ryvendale. It is that he desires to marry the young lady, the daughter of the pasteur."

Then Viva awakes to the full sense of her position. She makes no sign, but sits there like one turned to stone, her lips parted, a strange fixed look in her eyes.

"Oh, miladi! do not look so!" cries Désirée, terrified. "Speak to me. It may be that it is false. Oh, I am sure, quite sure, that milord is incapable of such a horror!"

Viva's lips unclose; her voice sounds strange, even to her own ears, it is so cold and calm. She does not stay to question Désirée; not for one moment does she stop to doubt her statement; she *feels* that it is true.

"It is God's vengeance for my sins," she says, looking away with her far-off eyes at the stretch of landscape lying before her in the sunshine,—looking, yet not seeming to see it, though the scene is so indelibly impressed upon her mind that in the after-days she could never remember that time of anguish, without seeing the park, and the purple clover-field, and the half-cut corn.

"Until this moment," she goes on, in a half-dreamy tone, "I never fully realized what I must be in the sight of God,

and in the world's sight, and" (shuddering) "even in his eyes. Oh, Désirée! I wonder how you, who are good and virtuous, have lived with me through these years, and always treated me with honor and respect, knowing all the time how low I have fallen,—that I am such a one as good women would shrink from letting their dress touch in passing."

Désirée has no answer but her tears and sobs. Oh, could she but find words to tell that beloved one how, in her poor sight, she is as honored, as reverenced, as any saint who ever trod this sad world! But the fear lest she should wound instead of soothing that tender heart restrains her.

"Tell me all that you know," Viva says, gently, pressing her shoulder. "Do not be afraid! you see how well I bear it."

And, in truth, she seemed gifted with a supernatural calm: no tears dim her steadfast eyes; in her voice there is no faintest tremor.

Désirée, half misled by her tranquillity, relates, with tears and sighs and many ejaculations, the story she has heard from Fletcher. Every word pierces Viva's heart like a knife, and yet she betrays no sign of emotion. She knows that her day of retribution has come, and is nerving herself to bear it. And she has the instinct of race, that prompts her to hide her torment, even from so faithful a friend as Désirée.

When the recital is ended, she says, in her usual gentle voice,—

"Thank you, my good friend, for telling me: you have done well. And now leave me a little: I want to be alone, that I may think."

But Désirée is frightened at her calmness, and implores to be allowed to stay.

"What are you afraid of, ma bonne?" asks Viva, quietly, and she has even the courage to smile. "Do not be uneasy. Have not I still my child to live for?"

And then, for the first time, her voice trembles, and a mist comes before her eyes.

"Ah," cries Désirée, with energy, "miladi has well said: with an angel like that, it would not be hard to console oneself for all the men in the world, traitors that they are!"

Viva locks the door softly, and returns to her seat. But in her heart she knows there is neither hope nor consolation to be found on the wide earth.

She sits down by the table that stands in the window, and pushes back the hair from her forehead with a monotonous, oft-repeated gesture. Still that same smiling landscape lies before her,—the bright green stretch of park, and, beyond, the cornfields and the clover. She thinks, despairingly, that everything is glad save herself,—that all the world can rejoice in this bright mocking sunshine save she alone.

Then a sudden storm of anger and rebellion shakes her breast. Oh, God! how is it fair or right that she, whose heart is faithful, should suffer such torment, whilst the men who have wronged her go free and unscathed? Her husband, the first cause of her misery, is still going about the world, courted, fêted, thought well of, and Alsager, Alsager for whose sake she has given up honor, reputation, all that makes a woman's life tolerable, is to begin life again under fair, happy auspices, whilst she, steeped in shame and anguish, will be thrust forever from his heart, his home, his life. She remembers how he loved her in the old days; she calls to mind his impassioned vows, his promises of unchangeable fidelity; days when he swore no woman was so fair as she, and wondered, with no simulated wonder, how the duke, possessing so fair a wife, could have his fancy stirred by any other woman on earth. All the sweet flatteries in which love delights, and which he had heaped upon her, return to her and contrast themselves with his coldness and treachery of to-day. The ardent glances of his eloquent eyes, the tender modulation of his voice to her, the thousand sweet ways and devices that love keeps for the beloved, and of which he had been so lavish to her whilst the flame of his passion yet burned,—all these things memory pours out before her as she sits in the quiet room with the warm south wind caressing her pale face and toying with her hair. She can see the flowers opening their hearts to the sun, the gay-hued butterflies chasing each other to and fro, the birds hopping gayly on the lawn, and she wonders, in a dumb agony, how God can have made his world so fair and some of his creatures so unutterably wretched.

What is to become of her? She must leave Alsager: nay, the very thought of him is hateful and intolerable to her now: she feels that were he here this moment she would shrink from his touch as she would from contact with a serpent. At first she thinks she will go away, taking her child and Désirée, and hide herself where he can never find her; but then she

says bitterly to herself that he would not care,—nay, rather it would be a relief to him to get rid of her so easily. And she has no money. He has always been most liberal to her, but she has had no occasion for money, and he has never permitted her to be troubled with housekeeping details. She will send for her uncle, will implore his forgiveness on her knees, will beg his help; did he not bid her do so in that letter which, for shame's sake, she had never acknowledged? But then there comes to her the agony of knowing that she *cannot* live without Alsager,—that no matter his coldness, his infidelity, let come what will, the worst misery that could befall her would not be so bitter as to lose him, to be sundered forever from him, to think that another woman held his heart, his love, whilst she was dying a slow, agonizing death out of sight and hearing of him. What *shall* she do? Twice Désirée has rapped gently at her door, and she has bidden her come again in an hour's time, and she is no nearer to a decision, nor can she fix on any plan that may give her hope for the future or relieve her present despair. Shall she confront him, tell him that she has discovered his secret, remind him of the past, of all she has sacrificed for him, conjure him by heaven and earth, by all he holds sacred, not to condemn her to a death in life? Nay, she knows that there is nothing so hopeless as an appeal from love to pity! If she hide her breaking heart as the Spartan boy hid the fox,—if she wreathe her face with smiles,—if, whilst torn with hidden agony, she try to lure back his fancy with the wiles that were so easy when love was still warm, but are so flat and dull now love has grown cold,—can she hope to revive the burnt-out flame? She dares not hope so. What then? A sudden thought flashes across her brain. She will see this new love of his,—will throw herself upon this stranger's mercy, will conjure her to have pity upon her, and to give her back the man on whom her very being hangs. It is a poor, mean, pitiful rôle, truly; but when one's heart, soul, life, future, all depend upon a thing, surely one may sacrifice somewhat of pride.

When Lord Ryvendale returns to dinner, Viva receives him with smiles. She wears his favorite colors: it is long since he has seen her so gay and cheerful. Ah! time was when she could not so easily have deceived him,—when the sharp wit of love would have pierced the hollow mirth of her smile,

would have been swift to hear how near her laughter lay to tears; but Alsager's heart has grown dull to the intonations of her voice, indifferent to the change of her moods.

"Thank heaven," he thinks, with a sense of relief, "she has put off her woebegone look for once. Upon my soul, when she smiles, she is still a pretty woman."

He takes the opportunity of her being in a good humor to suggest that, as Bertie is really out of danger now, he may as well go to Scotland on the tenth. Somehow, since the child's illness, he has not dared to think of broaching to Viva his intention of forsaking her, and, keenly as he longs to see Osyth, he hesitates to do so until he can tell her that he is on the eve of breaking the connection that alone prevents his asking her hand of her father.

He is not a little surprised when Viva gives a hearty consent to his Scotch trip, and appears to take a lively interest in hearing what houses he intends to stay at, and what chance there is of sport.

Poor Viva, whose heart has so often been racked with wild jealousy at the thought of Alsager's meeting charming and pretty women, would be glad now to know that there is a chance of his being thrown among some of her sex fascinating enough to alienate his affections from her rival at Ryvendale. She no longer has any confidence in herself,—she, who is still beautiful enough, gracious enough, young enough to have a thousand men at her feet.

---

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

LATE one August afternoon, Osyth is wending her way to the village, in answer to a request from the landlady of the "Bell Inn" that she will look in there. Imagining that the woman's child is ill again, she has hastened to obey the summons. Mrs. Ross is standing at the inn door: her face is flushed, and she turns the hem of her large white apron nervously in her fingers.

"If you please, miss," she says, in a hurried whisper, as Osyth enters the door, "I hope you won't be angered with me: it's none o' my doin's, but there's a lady in yonder" (beckoning with her hand towards the parlor) "as 'ud be glad to have a word with you."

A sudden tremor comes over Osyth: her cheek pales, her knees knock together. A presentiment who it is that awaits her takes chill hold of her.

"You haven't no call to be afeard, miss," whispers the landlady; "and I shall be just handy. Poor soul! it's little harm she has it in her to do any one."

"Who is it?" Osyth asks, in a faltering voice.

"Well, miss," returns Mrs. Ross, looking puzzled, "I don't know rightly how to call her, but—but she's Lord Ryvendale's lady."

Osyth's courage fails her: she is literally afraid. I think, in her simple heart, she expects to see some bold, painted, shameless woman, some virago who will perhaps assail her with bitter vituperation.

The landlady reads Osyth's face.

"Why, miss," she urges, "you don't think I'd let you see her if she was such as one might expect? Lor! you'd never tell her for what she is: she's softer-spoken nor my lady up at the Court, and that's saying somethin'."

"Why does she want to see me?" asks Osyth, still unconvinced.

"Nay, miss," returns Mrs. Ross, with a shrewd glance, "that's more nor I can tell you, but she's bent on seeing you, and a pretty job they had to get me to be in with her doin' it. If you're afeard when you see her, keep your hand on the door and call, and I'll be there in no time, I warrant you."

So Osyth nerves herself and enters the parlor. But she does not keep her hand on the door, nor prepare to call for help: one glance at the face before her is sufficient to remove all apprehension.

Viva rises from her chair and advances a step; then, for a moment, the two women look at each other,—the one who loves and has been loved, the one who loves and is loved.

Osyth sees a beautiful but most sad face, a figure full of dignity and grace, a woman whose air and carriage stamp her unmistakably as one intended to occupy a high place in the

world. And, as she looks at her, a sense of inferiority smites her, not sharply, but with a dull sense of pain. It is as though something whispered to her, "If she could not retain his love, how can you, who are so far inferior to her in charms, hope to keep it?" And on her side, Viva thinks, "She is not beautiful, but she has a fair, good face. She is amiable and sweet-tempered, not easily ruffled nor angered as I am: he would have repose with her: that is her charm for him."

She is the first to speak. Her voice is tremulous; there are tears in her eyes. She has so little nerve now, the least agitation brings those unbidden, unwelcome guests.

"I am glad you have come; I was most anxious to see you," she begins, in that low, soft voice that men were once wont to think one of her greatest charms.

"You will guess" (faltering) "who I am. I am——" she is going to say Lady Ryvendale, the only name she has known for nearly three years, but she stops suddenly, remembering that she has no right to it,—that perhaps ere long it will belong to the girl who stands before her.

"I am the Duchess de Lallière," she says, with a slight accent of hauteur, trying by that poor means to hide the shame she feels in uttering it.

Osyth inclines her head: she cannot think of any word to say, though compassion has already found its way to her kind heart.

Viva motions her to a seat, and she takes it at once without demur. Viva sinks into a chair by the table: her clasped hands rest upon it; her face is half turned from Osyth towards the window, screened by the large geraniums that are the landlady's pride.

"You wonder, perhaps," she says, in a low, hurried voice, "why I wanted to see you. If you had known, you would not have come. I have no claim upon you: how can I expect a sacrifice from you, when he——"

Her voice fails her: the great tears roll down her pale cheeks, and fall on her slender, clasped hands.

A cold chill sweeps over Osyth's heart. Two months ago, her life was so calm and even, nothing could have seriously ruffled her if all were well with Riette and her father; but now it is different: her heart is gone from her own keeping: it rests with another than herself to make or mar her life.

She knows by intuition what the duchess wants of her: she has come to ask her to give up Lord Ryvendale. And a throe of bitter agony shakes her to the very soul.

"Oh," cries Viva, in a low, passionate voice, "what can he be to you in comparison with what he is to me? You have not sinned for his sake, suffered for his sake! he is not the only one living being in the world to you! You have relations, you have friends, and I—I have no one. He is my all: I *cannot* live without him. Oh, have some pity on me! do not take him from me!" She falls at Osyth's feet. She makes a gesture as though she would take her hand, but suddenly restrains herself. Her delicate, sensitive mind calls up the barrier that separates her from this girl: never for one instant, now, does she forget the shame that stamps her different from her unfallen sisters.

Osyth sits like one stunned: her mind is a chaos in which she can distinguish nothing clearly,—neither right nor wrong, nor this woman's claims nor her own upon the man whom, most unhappily, they both love.

The duchess is so entirely different from the woman she has always pictured to herself,—the woman she has thought of as a guilty creature, a temptress under whose fatal thrall Alsager had fallen. From her it would have been a right and virtuous act to separate him, to wean him by every means in her power. But this tender, delicate creature with the grievous face, the pathetic voice, who is pleading to her as for dear life to give him back to her!

Osyth feels that, instead of committing a meritorious action in tearing him from Viva's arms, she will be guilty of an act of selfish cruelty. She has been fain to think evil of her: now she is smitten with a great pity. But nothing seems clear to her. The scheme for Lord Ryvendale's salvation, his restoration to a life of usefulness and happiness, her own share in it, and the utter joy she had looked forward to from his love,—all seem swept away to an immeasurable distance. Two months ago, she could have taken the hand of this poor erring sister and besought her, for Christ's sake and for her own soul's sake, to repent and turn from her sin; but now no such words come to her lips: they would be only a bitter mockery: she would seem to be pleading selfishly for her own love's sake. And, beset and wrung by doubts, she sends up a bitter yearn-

ing cry from the depths of her soul, "O God, show me what to do!"

She hears, as though afar off, Viva's pathetic voice; as through a mist she sees the beautiful blue eyes dimmed by many tears; and suddenly a chord vibrates in her heart, and she too falls to bitter weeping.

Strange freak of fate! These two women who are rivals, whose hearts should, by all the laws of probability, be filled with a mutual hatred and jealousy, are, instead, smitten by a tender pity of each other. It is rare indeed that two such noble natures meet.

Viva is saying to herself, "Poor girl! she loves him: she might lead a happy life with him, whilst, as for me, he will never love me again. My life is wasted and spoiled: I have no hope in the future: why should I mar hers?"

For a moment she is prompted to say, "Be happy with him. Forget what I have said. I will go away and leave you to each other and never trouble you any more."

But no! all her love for Alsager comes surging back at the thought of losing him: never, never will *she* speak the words that are to separate them. And how can this girl feel a pang at losing him equal to hers? She has known him but a few short weeks; it will be easy enough for her to go back to her life without him,—a life of which as yet he cannot have altered any circumstance. But for herself, Alsager is the mainspring of her life. His mere presence, changed, cold, indifferent as he has grown, is joy compared with the thought of utter severance from him.

Osyth conquers her emotion by a violent effort and rises to her feet.

"I must have time to think," she says, in a low voice. "I cannot tell now what I ought to do. But oh" (her voice faltering), "it is a hard thing you ask of me."

"Is it harder for you or me?" asks Viva, mournfully. "You have not changed all your life for his sake; you have not fallen from a high position to one of shame and utter isolation for his sake! Ah" (pleadingly), "you look kind and good: do you think you could enjoy your happiness with him whilst you knew that my heart was broken, that every hour in which you were rejoicing in his presence was an hour of agony to me?"

The words penetrate Osyth's very heart: she knows that she will have to give Lord Ryvendale up; she will never be able to forget this beautiful, agonized face,—the pleading eyes and words: her own heart will not let her buy happiness for herself at the cost of this other woman's misery.

"I cannot answer you now," she says, again, "but to-morrow—" (hesitating), "to-morrow I will write to you, if you will tell me your address."

Viva writes hastily on a slip of paper and gives it to Osyth. Her face is dyed with burning blushes.

"I am always called Lady Ryvendale," she says, almost in an apologetic tone.

Osyth turns to go. She has made a little inclination of her head, to which Viva has responded in kind; but then some other feeling comes into her sweet, compassionate heart, and, turning, she stretches out her hand. For one moment they stand hand in hand, their eyes wet with unshed tears, their lips quivering with some undefined emotion: God knows that in the heart of either there is at this moment no feeling of rivalry or jealousy.

Osyth goes out like one stunned, and makes her way homewards. She does not stop, as is her gentle wont, to speak to the children who cross her path, nor to ask after the ailments of her old women at their cottage doors; she does not see the ruddy gold of the sky, nor the dying sun's valediction to the gay-hued flowers: it might be spring or autumn, or the nipping cold of winter, for aught she knows to the contrary. Her father is in the garden, but she does not join him. Riette calls to her, but she answers not, only hurries away to her own chamber, and fast locks the door. With a rapid gesture, she throws aside her hat, and pulls down the blind and shuts the window. She will not have a stray sunbeam nor a climbing rose for witness to her mortal agony,—to the death-struggle of her dear hopes. Then she throws herself on her bed and hides her face in her pillow, with sobs and stifled cries. Even her faithful, trusting soul cannot for the moment look up through this black night of despair to the God who makes everything work together for good to those who love him.

It is a crushing blow,—one, she feels, that all her life through she will never rally from. Never before has she fully realized how absorbed her heart was in the thought of bringing

to a happy and useful life the man whom she so entirely loved. And now to leave him! to see him grow wild and reckless again, to let him return to a life worse perhaps than the old one! Before to-day she had felt that to wean him from his connection with the duchess was the first step towards his salvation, but now, since she has seen her, she can no longer think that. The judgment of this unhappy woman is in God's hands: if he will be avenged of her for her sin, judgment is for him; but for her, no! she dares not constitute herself the instrument of punishing this most unhappy soul. Nevermore will Lord Ryvendale be aught to her; nevermore may she cherish those hopes that have brought her such exceeding joy. But, after the first paroxysm of her grief is over, the old faith and trust, so deep-rooted in her soul, come stealing back, and with all her heart she tries to say to herself, "It is better if the will of God be so."

Meanwhile, Alsager, unprescient of the destruction of his hopes and projects, is enjoying excellent sport in Scotland, and, whilst thinking of Osyth as the woman who is to crown the rest of his life with joy and pleasure and to lead him to a sure haven of rest and peace, is winding up old accounts by a very *prononcé* flirtation with Mrs. Fairstar, who has been invited by their considerate hostess to add to the pleasure of his visit. If Osyth, who could not in her pure heart comprehend infidelity, had but been witness for one hour only of his tender words and manner, the glances of his most eloquent eyes, the thousand attentions that he bestowed upon pretty and appreciative Mrs. Fairstar, she would have suffered perhaps even more than she is doing now. For she would know that he was unworthy of her utter love and trust.

He had resolved to go straight from Scotland to Southshire, to see Osyth, and to write from Ryvendale to Viva, acquainting her as gently and feelingly as possible of their forthcoming separation and the cause of it. When it comes to that, he knows he will have to go through a vast amount of unpleasantness, so he is determined to make the most of any pleasure that presents itself in the interim. He has no cause to fear an indignant husband in Mr. Fairstar, who is shooting elsewhere, and the latitude for flirtation allowed by both host and hostess cause their house to be pronounced by the guests whom they invite "the jolliest quarters in Scotland."

After his sudden departure on receipt of the telegram, he had written to Osyth, telling her that circumstances had occurred which made it impossible, for the moment, that he should speak to her father, and begging her to wait and trust in him. And Osyth had waited and trusted in full and perfect confidence, feeling in him that security which only a great and faithful love can give.

Lord Ryvendale arrived at the Court on the 30th of August. For the first time since he had come into possession of Ryvendale, he had asked two or three men there for a week's shooting, and they were to arrive the following afternoon. He was determined to have one day to devote to his "fair saint," and was anticipating it with a very keen sense of pleasure. The morning after his arrival, he walked straight down to the rectory in a very happy and satisfied frame of mind. No faintest doubt as to his reception crossed his brain. In the garden he met Riette, who received him with the brightest smile of welcome.

"She is a sweet, pretty little girl," he thought to himself: "we will have her presented next season, and find a husband for her. She and Fairholme would suit each other to perfection."

"Osyth is in the kitchen, making a pudding," said Riette. "I will go and tell her you are here, but not for a minute or two, or our pudding will be spoiled."

"Won't you take me into the kitchen?" asked Lord Ryvendale: "there is nothing I should like more than to see the operation."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Riette. "But I am afraid Osie might not like it."

"She will not mind," said Alsager, with a pleasant feeling of authority, and quite sure, in his heart, that any one who took *him* to her would meet with a ready indulgence.

"Come, then!" laughed Riette, in high glee. "We will go in the back way. You must step very softly, or she will hear you."

Osyth is in the kitchen, rolling out paste. Her sleeves are tucked up to the elbow, and show her round white arms to perfection. She is standing with her back to the door, and the intruders pause for a moment on the threshold to watch her.

Lord Ryvendale is charmed. This homely occupation is another proof of her general goodness and usefulness. He would like to look longer, but a little stifled peal of laughter from Riette causes Osyth to turn her head. Then she catches sight of Lord Ryvendale's smiling, radiant face. He expects to see her smile in answer, perhaps to blush a little in a pretty shame at being discovered by him in so undignified a position, but, instead, she turns deadly white, there is an affrighted look in her eyes, and he cannot flatter himself for one moment that his sudden and unexpected appearance gives her the ghost of a sensation of pleasure.

"Did I startle you?" he says, coming hurriedly forward. "I am so sorry! I would not have played this trick upon you for the world if I had thought it would frighten you so much."

Her heart is beating wildly; her eyes, always so clear and confident, avoid his; she tries to say something, but her words are scarcely coherent.

Riette looks on in dismay: she knows that the temporary confusion of being found by Lord Ryvendale at her present occupation is not sufficient to account for her sister's strange look and manner, and a suspicion that she has been harboring for some days takes a clearer shape in her mind. Child as she is, she has a certain amount of tact, and hastens to the rescue.

"Come away," she says to Alsager, "or you will get me into disgrace. Come into the drawing-room and wait patiently until the pudding is made: it will not be long." And Lord Ryvendale, somewhat surprised and crestfallen, obeys her behest. When, a few minutes later, Osyth joins them, still very pale, but having recovered her wonted serenity, Riette dashes out of the window, affecting to pursue her favorite cat who is stalking across the lawn, but in reality taking flight because she is convinced that there is some private explanation necessary to set matters right between the pair whom she is leaving.

Lord Ryvendale goes forward to meet his love: he makes a gesture as though he would take her in his arms, but she recoils, and only offers a cold little hand to his eager clasp.

"Osyth, my darling! what has happened?" he cries, pained and startled. "It was not like this you bade me good-by."

In his guilty conscience he is already wondering if it is possible for her to have heard anything of his attentions to Mrs. Fairstar. Osyth is not one to shrink from her duty, however hard and bitter the doing of it may be. And now that he stands before her, with more, rather than less, of his old power over and fascination for her, she does not hesitate to say the words that give the death-warrant to her future.

"When we parted," she answers, in a low voice, not looking at him, but away beyond the roses and the old cedar, "I was overcome,—taken by surprise. For the moment, I thought——" And then she falters and hangs her head.

"You thought what, darling?" he cries, eagerly. "That knowing all you do about my past, that feeling I was quite unworthy of you, you were willing to trust your dear self to my keeping, and to believe in my capacity for growing better under your sweet guidance? Is not that so? And why should your thoughts have changed since? Has anything happened, have you heard anything that has shaken your confidence in me?"

"No," she answers, sighing, "but I have had time to think, and I know now that I can never be anything more to you than a friend."

"But," he argues, hotly, "have I not promised you, have you not my word, that I am about to renounce forever my—my connection with the Duchess de Lallière? I will write the letter this very day: you shall see it before I send it. Will not that satisfy you?"

"What will she do when you give her up?" asks Osyth, looking for the first time into Alsager's eyes.

He starts as though he had been stung. This from the girl who has so earnestly implored him to relinquish his *sin*,—the word that has been a synonyme between them for Viva.

"I do not know about these matters," she continues, a faint blush illumining her fair face, "but I suppose—I should think—did not you promise her once that you would always remain faithful to her?"

Lord Ryvendale colors, and answers, with some stiffness, "Of course it is usual for men to make protestations upon such occasions, though both parties are probably aware how little binding they are."

"And you think," asks Osyth, looking once more at him,

"that—that *she* knew, when you made her those promises, that you did not mean to keep them?"

Lord Ryvendale is silent for a moment. Her words bring back to him a keen remembrance of his passionate vows to Viva,—of how he had sworn to her by all he held sacred to be faithful to her unto his life's end.

His silence is sufficient answer.

"Then," says Osyth, in a low voice, "you ought to keep faith with her. I do not mean that you should live with her, but you should wait, and if ever she is free it is your bounden duty to marry her."

Lord Ryvendale feels stunned. These arguments from the lips of the girl whose heart he most truly believed he had won! whose one anxiety had seemed formerly to wean him from Viva! Not for one moment does it occur to him to think of the two women having met: in the first place, he is convinced that had Viva suspected him of treachery it would have been impossible for her to keep silence, and in the second, the idea of her coming into the county and seeking an interview with her rival is an action of which he would have sworn her to be utterly incapable.

---

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ONLY A WOMAN'S HEART.

"UPON my soul, I do not understand you!" Lord Ryvendale says, and there is an accent of anger in his voice. "Ever since I first knew you, you have been urging me to give up the duchess, and now, suddenly, for no reason that I can imagine, you array yourself on her side against me. "And" (his voice rising to passion) "when I talked to you of my future, and how it rested in the hands of some good woman to make me different from what I was, you knew well enough that you were the woman of whom I thought and spoke. And can you say that you did not give me encouragement? Why, if what I read in your eyes was not love, answering to mine,—if, the last time we met, you did not intend me to feel sure

that you consented to my prayer,—why, then, instead of being the sweet, pure creature I believed you, you must be the most thorough-paced jilt in creation! But no!" (his voice softening); "it is impossible you can be that!" And indeed the veriest tyro in judging character had only to look in that fair, true face, at those steadfast eyes, to be quite sure that the caprices and coquetries of her sex have no part or lot in Osyth.

But, because she is innocent, Lord Ryvendale's words do not hurt her the less: to be accused, with a semblance of justice, by the man whom she so entirely loves, and to be unable to defend herself, gives her cruel pain. But her own upright heart tells her that she must be faithful to her promise to the duchess not only in the letter but in the spirit, and that by no word or hint must she betray their interview.

"I hope you will not think ill of me," she says, humbly. "What you say is quite true. I did think, I did hope" (faltering); "but now I have had time to consider, and I am sure, quite sure, that the decision I have come to is the right one. I cannot be more than your friend; and now I am afraid you will not let me be that."

"I did not think you were a Pharisee," he answers, hotly. "No doubt you have come to the conclusion that you are far too good for a sinner like me; and when, by your fickleness and self-righteousness, you have sent me quite to the devil, you will have all the more reason to congratulate yourself on your escape."

He speaks sharply and angrily, hoping to rouse her to contradict him and to show that she still has some regard for him. But she only looks sorrowfully at him, and says,—

"I do not think you really believe what you are saying."

"Tell me, once for all," he says, vehemently, "do you mean me to understand that you give me up,—that you will not marry me, either now or at any future time?"

And, though her heart faints within her, Osyth answers, bravely,—

"Yes."

"Then I have indeed been deceived in you," says Lord Ryvendale, bitterly, turning to go. He neither takes her hand nor offers her any other kind of salutation, but goes without even a look. When he reaches the gate, he sees Riette running towards him. He would fain avoid her, but that is im-

possible. At so short a notice he cannot drive the anger from his face and replace it by a smile. Riette stops short, and then says, coloring violently,—

"What is the matter between you and Osyth?"

Lord Ryvendale feels rather glad to have a confidante: he is burning with indignation and wonder. He leans against the gate and regards Riette searchingly with his handsome eyes.

"I cannot tell what has come to your sister," he says. "I love her devotedly. I thought she cared for me; at least I had every reason to believe so when last I saw her. For weeks past I have been thinking of nothing but the happiness of making her my wife" (oh, Alsager!); "and now, without rhyme or reason, she throws me over, and will have nothing more to say to me."

Riette stands, halting between eager desire and fear of telling him what she suspects. But she is so anxious for her sister's welfare, so sure that Osyth loves Lord Ryvendale, so solicitous that she shall make this advantageous marriage and be mistress of Ryvendale Court! And, besides all these considerations, she is quite fond of Lord Ryvendale, whom she thinks the most delightful man she has ever met, Charlie perhaps excepted.

"Cannot you throw some light upon the matter?" Alsager asks her.

Riette pauses. At last she says, looking up in his face,—

"Did you really ask Osyth to marry you?"

"Most certainly I did."

"And did she say she would?"

"She gave me to understand as much. Unfortunately, at the very moment that I was pressing her for an answer, the telegram arrived that obliged me to leave at a moment's notice."

"But you think she meant to say yes."

"I feel as certain of it as that I am standing here this moment."

"And nothing has passed between you since then until this morning?"

"I wrote to her once, but my letter required no answer, unless she did not mean me to entertain the hopes I expressed in it."

Riette looks thoughtful.

"I think I know something," she says, in a low voice, "but I am afraid to tell you."

"Do not be afraid," replies Alsager, taking her hand; "you do not know what a service you may be doing me." And he looks into her eyes with an expression that she cannot resist.

"But I do not know anything for certain," says the girl, hesitating.

"Tell me only what you suspect, then," he urges, gently.

"One day last week, Osyth was sent for suddenly to 'The Bell,' the inn in the village, you know, and when she returned she shut herself in her room, and we did not see her again that night. And the next morning she looked so white and ill, though she went about just the same as ever. And—and—afterwards, I heard that a fly had come over from A—— and stopped two hours at 'The Bell,' and that a lady in black got out of it and went away again in it. Then I remembered that it was just at the very time that Mrs. Ross, the landlady, sent to ask if Osyth would step round there.'"

Riette stops suddenly, her face suffused with blushes, remembering that she has betrayed a knowledge she is not supposed to possess, and that, too, to no other than Lord Ryvendale himself.

But he, evidently, is unconscious of her indiscretion. His eyes are far off; he is murmuring to himself, "Can it be possible? That would account for it all."

For a moment he is tempted to go back to Osyth and wrest the truth from her: he will declare to her that, whether she marry him or not, he is lost to the duchess for ever and ever; but something tells him that he will not be successful in shaking her resolution. No! he has to do with Viva first. And, thanking Riette with a few hurried words and a warm pressure of the hand, he goes quickly home and expends his rage in a furious letter to Viva.

But, fortunately, the post does not go for some hours, and he has sufficient manliness, when he has somewhat cooled down, to refrain from sending that cruel letter. It will be better to manage her by fair means; if he tells her that she no longer holds his heart, that all his hopes for the future are centred upon his marriage with Osyth, her pride will no doubt cause her to give him up of her own free will. If she is

capable of coming to meet Osyth here and running all the attendant risks, she may do much more still to hamper and annoy him. Then he begins to wonder how she came to know about Miss Sartoris. Fletcher, of course. The fool has been chattering to Désirée. Désirée has, no doubt, gone straight to her mistress with the story.

Then, too, he suddenly remembers that Fletcher's sister keeps The Bell at Helmstone.

Alsager utters an angry oath. Not only then has this fellow betrayed him, but he must have connived at Viva's meeting Osyth.

He rings angrily for his servant.

Fletcher appears. He is fully prepared for what he knows must come, and has no intention of flinching. As he enters the room, the anger depicted on Lord Ryvendale's usually good-tempered face warns him that the day of reckoning has come. Alsager eyes him sternly. Fletcher does not flinch, but meets the look with a steady though respectful glance.

"You have been talking about me at The Beeches," says Lord Ryvendale, in a loud, angry voice. "Don't deny it! you had better tell the truth!"

Fletcher colors, but it is with indignation.

"I beg your pardon, my lord. I do not think your lordship has ever known me tell a lie."

"You have not only spoken of Miss Sartoris, but you have even connived at Lady Ryvendale's seeing her!"

"Yes, my lord," answers Fletcher, firmly.

"D—— you! how dare you stand there and brave me to my face?"

"Your lordship said I was to speak the truth," says Fletcher, still preserving his respectful tone.

"Oh, very well," utters Lord Ryvendale, recovering his calmness. "You will probably not be surprised to hear that from this moment I dispense with your services. Your wages are due next week,—fifteen pounds; and that, I suppose" (flinging down another ten-pound note), "will satisfy your claims for the month."

"Thank you, my lord," says Fletcher, taking up the notes and putting down two sovereigns: "a month's wages and board wages would be eight pounds. I am sorry to leave your lordship. I hope I have always done my duty by you. Under

the circumstances, I should not have wished to live longer in your lordship's service."

He goes out quietly, leaving Alsager furious.

It is but poor satisfaction to d—— the fellow's impudence: he quite understands the tacit reproach conveyed in Fletcher's words. He knows the man thinks he has behaved badly, and, being conscious that such is the case, he is all the more enraged that any one else should presume to be of the same opinion. Besides, it is a horrible nuisance to lose Fletcher, who has been ten years in his service and knows all his ways. He has always vaunted him as the best servant living, and declared that he would rather give him five hundred a year than lose him, and now, all at once, without time to look for a successor, the man is irretrievably lost to him.

Lord Ryvendale is thoroughly put out. He wishes himself a hundred miles from Ryvendale; but his guests are coming to-day; there is no time to put them off, and here he must remain, for at least a week, near Osyth, and yet unable to see her, and with the extreme discomfort of being servantless. He is half minded to send a request to Fletcher to stay the week, but his dignity forbids him. He promises himself to be revenged on the fellow by not giving him a character, but remembers, with disgust, how many of his friends have envied him Fletcher, and would take him on at once, without waiting for his character. And if Fletcher chose to give the real reason of his dismissal, who would think the worse of him for it?

The week that followed was one of positive torture to Alsager. His duties as host bored him insufferably: he took no pleasure in sport, and was ten times more in love with Osyth than ever. Added to this, for almost the first time in his life, he was feeling anything but well: his appetite failed him, he had shivering-fits, a deadly nausea seized him at times: he could hardly make the effort to play at host. Most joyfully he bade good-by to his guests, and prepared to leave the Court himself. He had the instinct of the sick animal, to get home when he was suffering, and "The Beeches" was still more home to him than any other place.

When he reached it, he was too ill to think of any explanation with Viva: all he wanted was to be put to bed and have the doctor sent for. He had a presentiment that he was going

to be horribly ill, perhaps to die. And when Viva saw him suffering, we may be quite sure that she forgot all her wrongs and his cruelty to her, and that one purpose alone animated her tender breast,—to watch over him, as a woman watches over what she loves best in the world; to seek by every means in her power to alleviate his pain. A pang of reproach smote Alsager as he saw her devotion, knowing all the time that she was aware of his meditated treachery. But he was too ill long to think of anything but his own condition.

The next day he attempted to rise, and sat up for an hour or two shivering and cowering over the fire. He was restless, irritable, nervous, constantly wanting something or other, and being dissatisfied when it was done. He missed Fletcher sorely, and would willingly have condoned his offence to have him back again. He nearly worried Viva to death with his perpetual wants and complaints, but she was as patient as an angel, and in her intense anxiety for him was only too glad to humor his every whim. A physician was summoned, and held a long consultation with the local doctor: they spoke cheerfully to the patient, but did not hesitate to tell Viva that there was cause for the gravest anxiety,—that, indeed, there was no doubt Lord Ryvendale was suffering from an attack of typhoid fever. He must be put to bed at once, and a nurse sent for: the physician will see to that matter.

It is late in the afternoon, too late for a nurse to be selected and sent down to-night, and on the morrow Viva has resolved to send for Fletcher, whose whereabouts she knows: meantime, she will keep this first night's vigil over her beloved. For he is still her beloved, in spite of all she has suffered at his hands; she may deplore, but cannot conquer, her great love for him. There is a sort of melancholy joy to her in the fact that, in his pain and sickness, she can have him all to herself: no one will covet him of her now.

She is sitting by his bedside, holding his fevered hand. He, who has been longing of late to thrust her from him, to be quit of her, finds comfort and relief in her presence now. Occasionally he speaks, and she answers him by a few gentle, low-toned words, but her great anxiety is to soothe and get him off to sleep.

Presently he says, querulously,—

"I am not at all sure those fellows know what is the mat-

ter wich me. I remember having an attack very like this in Paris once. and the doctor there was a very sharp little fellow, and gave me something that set me on my legs again at once. I have the prescription now in my despatch-box. I wish you would go and look for it."

Viva, who knows that the great secret of nursing is never to contradict or deny a patient anything in reason, prepares at once to comply with his request.

"Where shall I find the key?" she asks: and he answers,—

"On my watch-chain."

So she takes it and goes, bidding Désirée remain within call.

Viva is on her knees, searching among the papers. Lying near the top is a letter addressed to herself, and stamped. Some impulse prompts her to take it, and yet she pauses to argue with herself upon the propriety of doing so. But, in the end, curiosity, which has been the bane of most of Eve's daughters, makes her possess herself of it and put it away in her pocket. Then she renews her search for the prescription. It is some time before she finds it, and when she returns to Alsager he is dozing.

It is a chilly night, and there is a bright fire in the room. Viva sits down on the hearth-rug, and gently breaks the seal of her letter. Oh, if some one could whisper even now to Alsager how she is occupied, he would yet have strength to crawl to her, to tear it from her hands and fling it into the flames. But he has fallen into a placid sleep, and Viva, unchecked, reads on. It is the letter he penned immediately after his interview with Osyth. She reads it through to the end, and then, keeping it still in her hand, looks into the fire. There are no tears in her eyes, nor is there any expression of strong emotion in her face, only a sort of stony, apathetic despair. And yet she knows little more than she knew before,—that Alsager had a new love, and would fain see her removed to make way for her rival. Only then he had wished to conceal his falseness from her; here he reproaches her with being a hindrance in his path. This is a part of the letter:

"You will doubtless rejoice to hear that your scheming has been successful, and that you have robbed me of the happiness which was my only hope in this world now. I love this pure

sweet girl with all my heart. I looked forward to becoming a better man, to leading a happier life, under her gentle guidance. When last I saw her, I had every reason to believe that she returned my feelings: this morning she has refused to look upon me in any other light than as a friend. And, but for a lucky accident, I should never have discovered that it was you whom I had to thank for the destruction of my dearest hopes. And why, may I ask, have you done this? Is it from motives of revenge, or can you possibly entertain the delusion that such a course on your part would be likely to win back my affection? If that be the case, let me tell you that I wish to God I could think I should never see you again. You are, or have been, a woman of the world; you must know well that a connection such as ours cannot go on forever. Had the duke died, of course I should have married you in spite of everything. But there is no more chance of his death than of yours or mine. I no longer make you happy, nor do you me: do you insist that because you are miserable you will doom me to wretchedness? Am I forever to drag about the chains that have grown intolerable to me?

"You have triumphed: you have spoiled all my future life. Let that content you! but never again hope to obtain one grain of my love, or think that I shall have any recollection of you save to curse you."

This is the substance of the letter that, in the heat of his passion, Lord Ryvendale wrote, but forebore to send to Viva. He had thrown it into his despatch-box, and, when he sent Viva in quest of the prescription, had entirely forgotten its existence.

Viva sits motionless, staring at the fire: she is almost surprised that she feels so little. Her senses are temporarily benumbed. One often wonders to see the calmness with which people bear, for the time, a grief that we think will go near to kill them: it is the merciful provision of nature, that envelops the victim of a terrible blow in a covering of apathy.

"Viva! Viva! where are you?"

She starts, and hides the letter in her pocket. It is Alsager's voice calling fretfully to her.

"My head aches. Come and sit here and put your hand upon it."

A sudden revulsion of feeling seizes her: it is abhorrent to her to touch him: as fain, almost, would she caress a deadly snake. But she masters herself, and, sitting beside him, passes her hand gently to and fro over his forehead and hair. Again he falls into a doze, and she keeps her watch beside him. There is a fitful gleam from the flickering firelight, and, in this ghostly silence, Viva's brain is busy with crowding thoughts. There seems something unreal to her about the situation: is it possible that this man over whom she is watching is the same who, when she last nursed him, was full of deep and passionate love for her, but who has lived to curse her? Yes! to curse her! The thought seems to turn her to stone: every time she remembers the last words of his letter, they strike her with a fresh shock. She does not stop to tell herself that the letter was written in a fit of anger and disappointment, and repented of: she takes it as the true expression of his feeling for her.

All through the night, she watches by him: sometimes he dozes, sometimes wakes up and mutters deliriously, or calls for water, or implores her not to leave him.

And all the time, whilst she waits upon him with untiring gentleness, her brain is busy with plans for the future.

She will nurse him till he is well, and then she will go away, and he shall never hear of her again.

---

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### "A LEAVE-TAKING."

Lord Ryvendale goes nigh unto the gates of death. For twenty-one days he lies on that dark threshold: no one can tell what change an hour may work in him. All that human skill and care can do for him is done. Fletcher comes the instant he receives the summons. All rancor goes from his honest heart when he sees the pitiful state to which his proud master is reduced: he is obliged to go away and cry like a child. There are two nurses, one for night and one for

day, and, above all, there is Viva, who can scarcely be induced to leave the patient for a minute. And although Alsager is almost always unconscious, he seems to retain some instinct about Viva: it is from her he takes food and medicine: if she is absent, his eyes seem to seek her. He is beyond any knowledge or anxiety about his own state: mostly he lies comatose, and wakes up delirous. He fancies himself a boy again, fishing, or shooting with his brother and the old keeper, or he imagines that he has been having wonderful sport on the moors, and is eager to tell Viva about the bag he has made. And she is careful to humor all his fancies, and never allows him to be contradicted.

But all this time that she is nerving herself to seem hopeful and cheerful, she is going about with a breaking heart. Not once does she bend over Alsager, or render him a service, but his words ring in her ears, "Never think that I shall have any recollection of you but to curse you." Yet she is torn with agony lest he should die. Who can bear the thought of him they love best, lying cold and dead, though they know that life will but give him to the arms of another? Never once does it enter Viva's brain to think that, if God took him, it would be well. She can pray now; there seems nothing to thrust her back from God; her sin no longer makes a gulf between her and heaven which her prayers cannot cross. All is over between her and her love; she will nurse and tend him, as all are bound to tend the sick, but, if he live, she will have no part in the joy of his recovery: she will be gone from sight and hearing of him forever. At this terrible thought her heart stands still. She wonders to herself how God, who is represented as all-merciful, all-powerful, can allow his creatures to be smitten with such dire agony.

"Oh," she said, "if I, who am so poor and frail, would not permit any one to suffer, even if he had wronged me, how can God, who can do all he will, see his poor creatures suffer such unutterable torment? I have sinned indeed, but has God no mercy for me? will he continue to crush me to the earth long after my sin has been expiated?"

Sometimes, as she sat at night, listening to Alsager's heavy breathing, the past would come back to her. How far, far off it seemed! it might be fifty years ago instead of five. Was it possible that she had ever been a bright, light-hearted girl,

full of fun and gayety,—she who to-day feels so old that at twenty-four she cannot even remember what it feels like to be young? Was it really and truly she who had been one of the most flattered and courted women at the French court,—she who is now condemned to the saddest, loneliest life a woman could lead? How well she remembers that night at Compiègne, when she impersonated Sorrow! how vividly D——'s words come back to her!—"Fancy you are La Vallière when she left the king for the second time, and he did not recall her." Ah, it needs no effort of her imagination now to guess at the anguish of that devoted heart.

Sometimes she would look at Alsager and wonder, in dumb pain, how his love for her could have turned to hate,—she, who had never reproached him, nor said bitter words to him, nor bemoaned her ruined life. Was it some fault in herself that she could not keep the love she won? The duke had been false to her, had wearied of her, and now Alsager.

It was a mercy for her that the unceasing attention Lord Ryvendale required kept her from brooding very long at a time over her sorrows: there is no panacea for the mind like activity of body. And she, who had become so frail and weakly, appeared to have supernatural strength given her: she never seemed weary, nor worn out, though she kept her watch all through the day and a great part of the night.

At last, at last, the crisis was over, and the physician pronounced that there was every chance of Lord Ryvendale's recovery. And, taking Viva very kindly by the hand, he said, with a certain dimness in his eyes,—

"I have every hope of him now, and he may thank you for his life. Good nursing is the great secret of pulling round a case of typhoid, and I never saw so devoted a nurse as you have been. You will have your reward: in a couple of months he will, I doubt not, be almost himself again."

Viva's lips quiver, her eyes are full of tears. Ah, when that day comes, it will be for others to rejoice with him. She will no longer have any part to play in his life. But the physician says to himself,—

"It is natural that, after keeping up so bravely all along, her nerves should give way a little now." So he bids her be of good heart and look forward to the bright days that are

coming, little guessing that every cheery word he utters sends the dagger farther home into her breast.

Lord Ryvendale has recovered his consciousness: he is even able to be lifted from the bed to the sofa. He makes no comment upon Fletcher's presence, but it is evident that he is glad to have him. As to Viva, though he says little, the expression of his eyes, as he watches her about, shows that something of his old affection for her has returned. The physician has told him that he owes his life to her, and he is grateful, like all who are still but one step from the valley of the shadow of death. Like the many, no doubt, his gratitude will ebb as his strength returns, and he will find it convenient, in the future, to make light of the debt he owes her, or to forget it altogether.

But now, though his brain is still weak and incapable of much thought, he has a dim purpose of making her reparation. That, after all his treachery to her, she should have exercised so divine a forgiveness upon him, should so abundantly have returned good for his evil, deserves some great answering sacrifice on his part. He intends to give up all thought of Osyth. He would like to tell Viva what is in his heart, but as yet he is not strong enough. Now and then he takes her hand with a feeble pressure, and looks into her face with something of the old love. He is not surprised that she returns neither glance nor pressure, knowing what she knows. She is always gentle and tender, always ready to anticipate his wants, but the endearments that love is so lavish of, most of all when he has gone nigh to lose what he treasures, are absent. He consoles himself by thinking how easy a task it will be to win her back, when he is only strong enough to bear the excitement that an explanation must necessarily cause.

All the while that he is making his plans so securely, Viva is bracing herself to meet the future without him. Every day she is a day nearer to parting from him forever, and Death himself could not inspire her with more anguish and terror than the thought of life without him,—altogether without him, unbrightened by any ray of hope that he will be aught to her or she to him again as long as their lives last.

Dimly she conjectures of the workings of his mind: the

nobility of her own nature causes her to feel that he is bound to make her reparation: it is for her then to prevent the sacrifice, to put it out of his power to make. And yet there are moments when she is so weak that she is fain to stay, and let the past seem forgotten, even though she is aware that it would only be delaying her misery a few months longer. For she knows instinctively that, once strong again, once more independent of her love and care, his thoughts and wishes will flow back to the channel from which a momentary current of good feeling has diverted them. She will not leave him until he is really able to do without her; she will not run the risk of any shock to his weakened system: so she still lets the days slide by, happy, poor heart! that the one has not yet dawned that is to tear him from her.

Lord Ryvendale is able, leaning on Fletcher's arm, to totter into an adjoining room; the doctor has given permission for him to drive out in a day or two; it is already under discussion where the convalescent shall go to recruit his strength. And Viva, with the mental courage which some strange freak of nature gives so often to the weak and frail in body, enters into all the plans as though her heart were not breaking within her at the knowledge that when he goes she will not be with him. And, with the irony in which Fate takes such strange pleasure, Alsager shows himself most solicitous that Viva's own wishes as to their destination shall be considered: he will hardly have a voice in the matter, but is eager in urging her not to study him,—only to think of what will be most agreeable to herself.

So the time has come to act, and, with a trembling hand, Viva takes up her pen to write to her uncle. She knows him too well to believe that he will refuse to assist her, but the most she expects of him is some small annuity that will enable her, with her child and Désirée, to live independent of help from Lord Ryvendale. She is as ignorant as a baby about money matters; she does not even know that the interest of the sum settled upon her by her uncle is hers. Alsager had declined to receive it for her, and had never even mentioned to her the correspondence that had passed upon the subject between himself and Mr. Carlton's lawyer. What was a pitiful four hundred a year to Lord Ryvendale!

She writes thus:

"In a kind letter you wrote to me nearly three years ago, which I hope you will forgive me for not having acknowledged, you told me, if I ever stood in need of help, to apply to you. That time has come now. I wish to leave Lord Ryvendale forever, and, as it would be impossible for me to remain dependent upon his charity, I hope you will take pity upon me and give me enough for my child, Désirée, and myself to live upon. Indeed, I want but little; life is not sweet to me now, and I do not care very much what becomes of me, only for them, poor things! who have done no wrong. Lord Ryvendale knows nothing of my intention, or he would, of course, oppose it. I hope you will forgive me and help me. Write to me; you will not care to see me. I do not sign myself your niece: you must wish, I am sure, to forget that you have any relationship with me.

"VIVA."

Bernard Carlton was at breakfast when the post-bag came in. There was some dozen or so of letters for him, and he stopped a moment to glance over the addresses. His quick eye singled out Viva's at once.

"At last!" he muttered to himself, and a close observer might have noticed something like a gleam of pleasure in his quiet face. He read it over twice, and sighed deeply; then he went on with his breakfast.

For the last three years he had been but little at The Towers; not because he shrank from his neighbors' eyes, or felt Viva's shame reflected upon himself, but because, after the heavy blow that had fallen upon him, the ordinary routine of his quiet life was not sufficient to keep him from brooding over it.

It was many years since he had travelled, and he knew well enough from experience that to carry the body over a vast number of miles is by no means the remedy best calculated to assuage the pains of the heart; nay, rather, the monotony of travel, the moving among unfamiliar scenes and faces, add the poignancy of intense loneliness to the original grief.

Above all other remedies for sorrow is intelligent and congenial companionship. To participate in splendid entertainments, or to mix with riotous merry-makers, is no panacea for grief, but only serves to accentuate it. The society of one or two pleasing and rational persons, whose intelligence and sym-

pathy take one out of oneself, is the surest method of enabling us to put aside for the time the trouble that haunts us. Bernard Carlton, knowing this, adopted for himself the prescription he had, upon occasion, given to others. He visited various Continental towns, taking his credentials with him, and everywhere receiving a cordial welcome. He preferred for a time the society of strangers: they did not know his troubles, and could not feel sorry for him. Of all things in the world that an Englishman hates, it is to be pitied. He had occasionally paid flying visits to The Towers, and had not avoided meeting his neighbors, but when one or two of the most intimate began to hazard a condolence about Viva, he seemed not to hear them, but commenced a fresh topic of conversation, in so pointed a manner that even the fools, who "rush in where angels fear to tread," were discomfited and never made a second attempt. To his best friend he never spoke of his niece, and every one jumped to the conclusion that he had cut her name out of the family Bible (so to speak) and cast her off forever.

But even his best friends did not know Bernard Carlton. How shocked some of them would have been to learn that no condemnation of Viva was written in his heart, that he had no other feeling for her than that of sincerest, tenderest pity!

The opportunity he had been so long expecting had come at last. Only the day before, a rumor had reached him that Lord Ryvendale was going to marry Miss Sartoris. He had no means of ascertaining the truth of the story, but it seemed to him quite possible that such might be the case. He was not filled with a burning indignation against Alsager; he was man of the world enough to know that a naturally pure-minded and proud woman, like Viva, would scarcely be likely to retain the affection of a man of Alsager's type. His love had been fanned into flame by her brilliant qualities and the accessories of her station, and in descending from her dignity she had forever relinquished what most attracted him.

Bernard Carlton knew the world; he had seen brazen, shameless women holding for years and years their sway over the heart of a man; he had seen them by sheer force of effrontery and thorough badness raise themselves to wealth and rank; he had seen ladies, fallen from their station by one false step, queening it unblushingly at foreign Baths, and successfully winning, and sometimes keeping, the love of a worthy

man; but he had never seen a delicate, sensitive nature like Viva's able to bear up against the weight of her self-scorn, nor capable of keeping the man upon whom her heart was fixed, flattered and amused by the little wiles and trickeries whereby men's fancies are kept.

The real story of Viva's flight was still unknown to him; he always believed that she deliberately left her husband's house with Captain Clive, goaded to the step by the duke's infidelity.

But one thing he *did* know, and that was that, sooner or later, she would come back to him, and, when she did come, he knew, too, how he would receive her. Although his mind was so well made up, Bernard Carlton did not depart from his principle of doing nothing in a hurry. He went from the dining-room to his study, and, throwing himself into a chair, was soon buried in thought. Nearly an hour later he sat down before his desk and wrote:

"My dear Niece,—

"You misjudge me in thinking that I no longer wish to remember your kinship to me. You are almost the only relative I have,—certainly the nearest and dearest. When I bade you come to me if you ever stood in need of a friend, it was no mere *façon de parler*, but the expression of a desire which since that time has undergone no change. Write to me, and let me know what day you fix for leaving your present home, and tell me when and where to meet you. I am prepared to go with you to any place you may select. Have no anxiety about money matters; my purse is yours, and, besides that, you have money of your own.

"Ever your affectionate uncle,

"Bernard Carlton."

I do not presume for one moment to suppose that the general reader will approve of Mr. Carlton's letter. He (or let me say she) will probably think that he was tacitly encouraging vice, that even if he did help her in her extremity he ought first to have written her a long sermon upon the heinousness of her sin and the justice of the retribution which had overtaken her. But are we told that the father of the Prodigal Son received him with lectures and diatribes? or that

"while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him"? How did Jesus receive the "woman that was a sinner" who came to him as he sat at meat in the Pharisee's house? And, as the instincts of mercy and pity are those which render men most Godlike, I venture to think that Bernard Carlton, in refraining from adding one grain of sadness to that already stricken heart, was following to the letter the most divine examples that Scripture history gives us.

When Viva read the letter, she cried as though her heart would break. The bitterest reproaches could not have wrung her heart as this kindness did, nor have made her feel more self-abased. She wrote back at once to her uncle, fixing the fifth day following to meet him in London, and asking him to name the place of rendezvous.

Fletcher, whose perceptions were remarkably quick, felt certain in his own mind that his mistress was contemplating flight. Or else why should she become more pale and sorrowful every day that Lord Ryvendale gained in strength? And now that she had written twice to Mr. Carlton, he was positive that his surmise was correct. She had each time given him the letter to post, and he knew by that she wished the fact of her having written to The Towers kept a secret. So, on the day that Mr. Carlton's second letter came, he sought Désirée, and told her to ask if her ladyship would allow him to speak with her. A few minutes later, he presented himself at the door of Viva's boudoir.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," he began, with some diffidence. "I hope your ladyship will not think I am taking too great a liberty."

"That I am sure I shall not," Viva answered, heartily.

"Of course," pursued Fletcher, "I know nothing of your ladyship's intentions, but if it should happen, as I am sure I hope it won't, that you have any thought of leaving my lord, I beg to say that I should like to remain in your ladyship's service, if I am able to give satisfaction. I am quite willing to make myself useful in any way whatever. I only came back to his lordship on account of his illness, and when he was quite strong again I always meant to leave him."

Viva hesitated for a moment; then she said, frankly,—

"I know I can trust you, Fletcher. You have guessed

rightly that I intend to leave Lord Ryvendale; but it is my most earnest desire that he shall suspect nothing of my intention until I have left the house. Most gladly would I take you into my service, if it were possible; but at present I have not the slightest idea what my plans are to be: all depend upon my uncle, Mr. Carlton. But if you will give me an address in town to which I can write, I will let you know in a month's time what my arrangements are, and you may be quite certain that, if I can keep you on, I will gladly do so."

"Thank you, my lady," said Fletcher, preparing to go.

"I leave here on Wednesday," continued Viva; "and, now that you know so much, I shall ask you to help me in the few preparations necessary for my departure."

The day comes. Viva has ordered the carriage, under pretext of taking a drive, and Désirée and the child are to bear her company. She can scarcely command her face as she enters Alsager's room, knowing that this is the last time she will see him or hear his voice,—that henceforth she will make no part of his life, nor he of hers.

"I hope you will have a pleasant drive," he says, in a cheery voice. "Do not hurry back. I expect my lawyer in half an hour, and I dare say he will keep me engaged for some time."

He stretches out his hand and draws her towards him.

"Kiss me," he says, and she bends down to him.

Her heart is throbbing with agony; her eyes are full of tears; even then, she is fain to fall at his feet and confess to him that she had meant to leave him, but that her courage fails her. With a rapid gesture, she brushes the tears from her eyes, and hurries from the room.

Life can never hold aught of promise for her again, she feels.

The errand upon which Lord Ryvendale's lawyer is coming to-day is another of Fate's cross-purposes. Upon this very day that Viva is leaving him forever, leaving him with the resolute intention of never again accepting the smallest thing at his hands, Alsager has summoned his lawyer to consult about making a handsome provision for her and her child. Many a time during his convalescence he has shuddered at the thought that, had he died, she would have been totally unprovided for save for the (to him) pitiful sum settled upon her by

her uncle. It does not for one moment occur to him that Mr. Carlton would give her any assistance after the disgrace she has inflicted upon him.

As Viva takes her last farewell of him, Alsager is so full of his project that he fails to remark her agitation. When she returns, he will tell her what he has done, in case another illness might still find his affairs unsettled.

He is not surprised that Viva does not make her appearance at lunch: his lawyer is there, and he knows how she dislikes meeting strangers. It is about five o'clock when he first inquires of Fletcher what has become of her ladyship.

Fletcher, with an impenetrable face, replies that she went by the one o'clock train to London and gave orders for the carriage to meet her again at seven.

Lord Ryvendale is thunderstruck. He has never before known her to go to London, except with him, *en route* for some other place.

"Has she gone alone?" he asks.

"No, my lord. Master Bertie and Désirée went with her ladyship."

"Did she leave no message?"

"Not that I know of, my lord."

Alsager feels stupefied. He does not for one moment believe that she has left him permanently, but there is some mystery connected with her journey, of that there can be no doubt. He waits with feverish impatience until the carriage returns from the seven-o'clock train. It is empty, and there is no other train to-night.

His suspicions are fairly aroused by this time. He sends for Fletcher. He is not very strong yet, and shakes as though he had the palsy.

"Where is Lady Ryvendale?" he asks, in a thick, hoarse voice.

"I do not know, my lord."

"It is a lie! you are in league with her!" cries Alsager, with sudden passion.

Fletcher makes no answer: he remembers that his master is still weak.

"I cannot bear suspense in my state. I beg, I entreat of you to tell me what you know." His voice is quite subdued now.

"It is the truth that I do not know where her ladyship is: she kept it from me purposely, lest you should ask me, my lord."

"Then she is gone? gone for good?"

"Yes, my lord, I believe so," says Fletcher, looking the other way. He cannot bear to see the pain written in every line of his master's face,—his master whom he has always been fond of.

"My God!" cries Alsager, trembling in every limb with grief and emotion; "what shall I do? how shall I get her back?"

Fletcher is moved to compassion: he knows that his master deserves punishment, but his kind heart hates to help inflict it. He takes a letter from his breast and lays it on the table.

"Her ladyship bade me give you this, my lord, after the carriage came back." And, whilst Lord Ryvendale tears open the envelope, he goes hurriedly out.

"When I wish you good-by to-day," the letter runs, "you will not suspect what I know, that it is forever. I have been long nerving myself for the effort, and, oh, I pray you, do not undervalue the agony it has cost me. A few weeks ago it would have been utterly impossible for me to take the initiative of a separation: indeed, you know that I forgot my pride so far as to appeal to Miss Sartoris not to rob me of you. I was weak enough to think that, if she gave you up, you might come back to me once more. I will tell you how I was undeceived. Do you remember the day after your return that you made me go and search for a prescription in your despatch-box? You had forgotten that you had left in it a letter, written to me, but not posted I do not know whether I did wrong in taking it; perhaps I did; but some strong impulse prompted me, and I put it in my pocket, and read it by the firelight that same night whilst I was watching over you. Do you remember, I wonder, what you said in it? every word is burnt into my heart like fire. You cursed me in it,—me whom once you loved so dearly! But I am not going to reproach you. It was, perhaps, some fault of mine that I could not keep your love: perhaps I was too anxious. God knows that every day only made you dearer to me. You will be sorry now, I know —most sorry for what has happened: your generous instincts will prompt you to seek me and bring me back. But do not

try; any attempt on your part would be utterly fruitless. I am going to my uncle. I cannot tell you how generously, how nobly he has forgiven me. I expected that he would cast me off, but, instead, he holds out a welcoming hand to me and bids me have no fears for the future. Do not think I cherish any unkind thoughts of you. God knows I forgive you all my suffering: you were perhaps only an instrument in his hand to punish me. I have loved you with all the devotion of my heart: my love was sin: the expiation of it is not yet finished. And you, some day,—not just yet, perhaps,—you will go back to Ryvendale, and you will tell that good woman whom you love that I have withdrawn my prayer to her; that now I give you to her, as once, nobly and generously, she gave you back to me. She will make you happier than I have done, and she will be able to keep your love. Once more I say to you, if you would refrain from giving me more pain than I already endure, do not attempt to shake my resolution: if you find out where I am, and come, or send, or write to me, I shall beg of my uncle to conceal it from me, and never even to mention your name. Again, good-by."

When Alsager finished the last word, he buried his face in his hands, overcome by an agony of remorse. Scalding tears forced themselves through his fingers: for the first time, he was aware of all the baseness and cruelty of which he had been guilty to the woman who had loved him so well. What would he not give to undo the work of the past four months? But Time treads not back upon his footsteps: the flowers of love, the golden fruit of opportunity, will not spring up fresh from under the scythe with which he has mown them down.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A SIREN OF SOCIETY.

SIR OTHO DESMOND is breakfasting in his rooms in St. James's Street. Do not be afraid! I am not going to describe them to you. They are just what you would expect the rooms of a young gentleman to be, who likes comfort with a dash of luxury, and who by putting his hand in his pocket can achieve much the same result as Aladdin did by rubbing a magic lamp or ring. It is nearly two years since he took wrathful leave of pretty Riette, and if I say that for something under eighteen months he has been heart-whole (as far as she is concerned, at least), I hope the gentle reader will not think any the worse of him on that account. In these days of progress, when the march of events seems so much more rapid than of yore, young men and maidens, the former especially, have not time for the long-drawn sentimental agonies in which the lovers of a generation or two since indulged.

For three weeks, at least, Otho had imagined himself heart broken; then, accepting an invitation to stay at a very pleasant house, his spirits had revived, and he was in a fair way of recovery, when his uncle's death occurred, and caused him a far deeper and more lasting grief than Riette's fickleness had done. He had been devoted to Sir George, and no thought of the advantages accruing to him from that dear one's death could mitigate the agony with which he sorrowed for him. Time consoled him, as it does old and young for all that happens,—Time, who, whilst he carries us away from past sorrows, forever casts fresh ones before our stumbling feet.

Otho has never seen Osyth or Riette since that memorable morning in the kitchen-garden. He has travelled, has stayed at Desmond Woods, but not once has he visited Helmstone Park since his uncle's funeral. He bears Riette no malice: indeed, how should he, seeing the retribution that has befallen that fickle little maid? For absence had not made Mr. Eger-

ton's heart grow fonder, and "I tell it to his shame" that six months after he plighted his troth to Riette he stood at the altar with the daughter of the colonel of his regiment, and soon after started with her for India. Strange to say, Otho, on hearing of his friend's faithless conduct, did not feel that burning indignation against him that his former brotherly affection for Riette should have prompted. On the contrary, he said to himself that it served her right.

Sir Otho is a great man now, much flattered and sought after: all the beautiful young girls in society's slave-market are passed in array before him, and, truth to tell, it would not seem a very hard fate to be knocked down to so handsome, manly, and amiable a young master. Otho's views on the subject of matrimony are, however, quite unformed. He has not committed himself in his mind either to celibacy or to wedded bliss. His position is that of a man who goes into a curiosity-shop, without any particular intention of buying, but who is open to be tempted should anything really strike his fancy. Up to the present moment, nothing has struck his fancy. Society has commenced an era the end of which it is extremely difficult to predict,—the era of married women stepping into girls' shoes and monopolizing the attention and devotion of young men. Twenty, or even fifteen, years ago, a married woman who flirted was, in England, rather an exception; now, shamefaced and wretched indeed is the woman of society who depends on her husband for the caressing attentions, the *petis soins*, that she considers her due.

Something might be said perhaps on her side as one remarks the growing disinclination of men to be seen in their wives' company.

Otho was learning the ways of his set, and had embarked on a very agreeable flirtation with our former acquaintance Mrs. Fairstar. He was by no means vicious, but there was a piquancy about the situation that laid hold of his imagination and gave an agreeable flavor to his season in London. He had no criminal intention of carrying off the fair dame from her lawful spouse: he was sagacious enough, in this instance, to endorse the epigram that "the greatest charm of a married woman is her husband."

Mr. Fairstar was absolutely indifferent to his pretty wife: if anything, he despised her. She was selfish and extravagant;

he was not rich. If she could find fools to waste their money on opera-boxes, expensive entertainments, acres of flowers, gloves, etc., etc., she was perfectly welcome to profit by their generosity, as long as he did not detect her in anything that compromised his own honor. He was by no means particular to conceal his contempt for her from the public, and scenes of strong domestic interest were not uncommonly offered to any one who happened to come to the house "in a quiet way." The men, of course, took her part, and if he had not been in his own house and they had not been afflicted by the guilty feeling that invariably smites men in the presence of the husband of the woman they admire, they would probably have kicked him, or tried to. Mr. Fairstar took a cynical delight in knowing the timorousness of his sex in this matter, and amused himself not unfrequently by exasperating his rivals at his wife's expense. Pretty Mrs. Fairstar had a great liking for Otho. He was young, handsome, devoted, and RICH. She had only to express a wish, and he flew to gratify it. He would have been her banker and jeweller too, but, unfortunately, Mr. Fairstar had an absurd objection to his wife wearing dresses and diamonds that other men paid for. He had clearly laid down for her guidance what she *might* accept and what she *must* decline.

"If," he said, "any fool likes to waste his money upon you, he may send you unlimited boxes at the Opera or theatre; he may give you any amount of Greenwich dinners, or entertainments of that nature, always provided that, like the immortal Becky, you take your sheep-dog with you; he may send you bouquets by the ton (I wish to heaven I could include coals among his permitted offerings), music by the gross; he may allow you to cheat him out of gloves, at races, in the most barefaced manner; he may present you with a poodle, or a pug, or any kind of a dog. None of these things are compromising. But the moment I see you in toilets that you cannot afford, or jewelry unfamiliar to my accustomed gaze, I shall begin to investigate your conduct with a less indulgent eye than heretofore. Heaven knows" (with a sigh) "how thankful I should be to any man who would give me back my freedom by carrying you off! but you are too clever for that. So I must protect myself in the best way I can from being made ridiculous and contemptible."

"You are positively inhuman," said his wife, crying with mortification "And to think" (with a gesture of disgust) "that I was once fond of you!"

"And to think," he retorted, "that *I* gave up four thousand a year for the sake of marrying you. I assure you, my dear, it is a positive pleasure to me to see other men making fools of themselves about you. If I were the one solitary victim of your fascinations, I should have gone to Hanwell and implored to be taken in long ago."

There is no woman breathing who can bear to hear herself undervalued by a man who has once been fond of her, even though she may have come to dislike and despise him; and Mrs. Fairstar was no exception to the rule. Still, she made excellent capital out of her husband's ill treatment. She did not harp much upon her afflictions, nor weep over them, because she knew that bored men, but she had an irresistible little way of looking sad for a moment and saying that "the world was disappointing," that "a woman who did not possess her husband's affections was the most desolate creature on the face of the earth," and that "to love and be loved with a real devotion was the only thing worth living for:" she (with an air of sweet resignation) was cut off from this happiness: there was nothing left to her but the poor husks of life; she must smile on, and try to deceive the world, though her heart was dying a slow death for want of sympathy.

This to a man, a young man, a man with no experience in wives, was very telling. Otho, whilst he listened, burned to shoot the scoundrel of a husband, and console his widow; but if Mr. Fairstar chanced to come into the room in the midst of the recital, Otho found himself shaking him cordially by the hand and replying rather obsequiously than otherwise to his remarks.

Lord Ryvendale still pays occasional visits to Mrs. Fairstar, and it not unfrequently happens that he and Otho meet there. Between the two there is a kind of unexplained antagonism that is not solely attributable to their mutual admiration for their fair hostess. Otho is far more jealous on Lady Ryvendale's account than on his own, though there *are* times when he is disposed personally to resent Alsager's caressing manner and whispered confidences to Mrs. Fairstar. What business has a married man, a man, moreover, married to the sweetest,

best woman on God's earth, to have tender glances and soft words for another woman? He always asks pointedly after Lady Ryvendale when they meet at Mrs. Fairstar's house, and his lordship, rather nettled by the younger man's tone, assumes an indifferent manner in replying.

"That is a thing I shall never understand, to the day of my death," says Otho, emphatically to himself,—"how *she* could marry that fellow!"

To return to the first lines of my chapter: "Sir Otho Desmond is breakfasting in his rooms in St. James's Street."

The "Morning Post" is often before him, and he has just read the announcement that Sir John and Lady Courtland and Miss Courtland have arrived at No. — Eaton Square from Southshire for the season.

"I'll call there to-day," resolves Sir Otho. "I have not seen them for an age. I wonder if the fair Alice has any more to say for herself than when I last met her. Upon my word, I don't believe I have set eyes on her since that day Charlie and I called there together. Poor old Charlie! Fancy his having a son and heir! And to think that, if I could have had my way, I should have been a staid old married man by now! I'm awfully glad I didn't. I dare say if I were to see Riette this minute I should wonder what I ever found in her to make myself so miserable about."

At three o'clock Sir Otho presents himself at No. — Eaton Square, and receives the answer that he desires,—"At home." He is ushered up-stairs and into the drawing-room, where no one is at first visible. But, in a moment, part of the white draperies detach themselves from the window, and a pretty young lady comes forward. Then she stops short: Sir Otho stops short: simultaneously a flame enkindles their faces, a paralytic seizure afflicts their limbs. It is only of momentary duration, though. Then, having recovered themselves, they say, "How d'ye do, Otho?" "How are you, Riette?" and shake hands with some cordiality.

"How handsome he has grown!" thinks Riette.

"By Jove, she *is* pretty, though," thinks Otho.

"What an immense time since I last saw you!" says the girl, when they have both seated themselves.

"Yes," answers Otho, smiling. "But not so long as I intended it to be when I last said 'good-by' to you."

Riette feels hurt: she could not have told why. It might be because the memory of her humiliation smote her, or because Otho could laugh to-day at having been so grieved to lose her.

"And how are Osyth and your father?" Otho asks.

"Papa is very well, but poor dear Osie is dreadfully delicate since her accident. Her nerves are shattered: she does not seem as though she could rally from it at all."

"Accident! What accident?" says Otho.

"Did you not hear of it? It was in all the papers."

"How long ago? I was in Paris for some time."

"It is two months now. She was out driving; one of the horses took fright; the coachman was dashed from the box and killed before her eyes, and she was very much bruised and hurt."

"How shocking! Poor dear Osie! And do you think if I had heard of it I should have taken no notice?" says Otho, reproachfully.

"I do not know. It is a long time since you have written to any of us," answers Riette.

"I was not sure that you would care for news of me," remarks Otho, tracing a pattern on the carpet with his stick.

"How can you say such a thing, Otho?" cries Riette, speaking naturally for the first time.

Sir Otho is about to reply, but changes his intention, and asks,—

"How is it that you are with the Courtlands?"

"Alsager arranged it for me. He is so kind and good. I think myself wonderfully fortunate in having such a delightful brother-in-law."

"H'm!" growls Otho.

"Osyth was to have spent this season in town, and I with her; we were to be presented together; but after the accident she had to give up all thought of it. Alsager was determined I should not be disappointed, and Lady Courtland came forward most kindly and offered to bring me up and chaperon me. Dora, her eldest daughter, is married, you know."

"And how is my fair friend Alice?" inquires Otho. "Do you remember that you destined her for me?"

Riette is piqued.

"Oh, she is very well. No doubt she will be here directly."

As she speaks, the door opens and admits Lady Courtland and her daughter.

Sir Otho is greeted with *empressement* by her ladyship, and with as much warmth by the fair Alice as her placid nature is capable of. That is not very much. People often observed that Lady Courtland was a detrimental mother. She was a remarkably agreeable woman, with an animated manner and an immense fund of small talk: very few men cared to talk to her daughters when she was present. She was neither a flirting mother nor a match-making mother, but she liked to talk, and knew that she talked well. Her daughters were so in the habit of listening to and admiring her that they had never made an attempt to cultivate conversation on their own account. And people cannot talk *well* unless they have devoted some study to the art.

Upon this occasion, as usual, all the talk is between Lady Courtland and Otho. When he rises to take leave, he has not spoken three words to Alice, but he has had leisure to remark the immense improvement in her. She is really very pretty indeed,—tall, fair, and statuesque-looking, with a smile which, though frequent, is not a simper. She looks as if there were really something in her, if one could only get at it.

"I suppose you are a month deep in engagements," says Lady Courtland, cordially, to Otho at parting; "but you must not forget old friends. This dear child is an older friend still," laying her hand on Riette's arm. "I am so delighted to have another débutante to chaperon: I should like to bring out a fresh one every season: I wish I had a dozen daughters. And now that I have lost dear Dora, Riette comes in to fill her place delightfully."

Lady Courtland is perfectly sincere, and is not at all jealous, as some mothers would be, of a pretty girl like Riette, who, besides, possesses all the vivacity that her own daughter lacks.

"Come and dine on Sunday in a friendly way."

Sir Otho accepts, although he has a previous engagement.

As he walks away from the door, he hears the church clock striking four.

"By Jove! I shall be late!" he says, waving his stick vigorously at a distant hansom. "Laura will be awfully angry with me for keeping her waiting."

Laura is Mrs. Fairstar.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### HAPPY EVER AFTER?

TWICE in his life, Lord Ryvendale has gained his heart's desire. How many men can boast as much? He had thought, in that past which seems so far off now, that he could sacrifice all he valued in life to obtain Viva. She became his. We know the end of that lawless love. But he had repented the error of his ways, had wearied of sin and sinner alike, was quite certain, in his heart, that the love of a woman like Osyth would lead him to paths of pleasantness and peace and make life something new and glad and hopeful for him. And, after obstacles that had only served the more to kindle his desire for that bright future, he had won his "fair saint." Never was lover more persistent; and, since the duchess had left him of her own free will, and Osyth's heart turned traitor against her resolves, what should she do but yield?

It must not be thought that Lord Ryvendale took Viva at her word all at once. Very earnestly did he try, at first, to win her back. He was sincerely grateful for her tender care of him during his illness. More than that, he missed her horribly. It was one thing that he should go away and leave her ill and sorrowful, to divert himself in pleasant company, but that *he*, still far from strong and without resources, should be called upon to get through the tedious days without *her*, was quite a different matter. A sort of irritable remorse took hold of him, and made him anything but agreeable to the people about him. Nothing went right: he hated to be asked what he would have for dinner; it worried him to think about anything, and every one was perpetually asking him for orders.

However, in time he got to do without Viva, in time he grew strong again, and all that remained to him was a sense of injury. She had saved his life, but she had behaved very badly in leaving him just when he most wanted her and was prepared to make such tremendous sacrifices for her. He

went back to Ryvendale, and there, by degrees, Osyth drove Viva out of his heart and mind altogether.

But Osyth had not forgotten Viva: her own heart told her what agony it must have cost the poor duchess to tear herself away from Lord Ryvendale: those words still rang in her ears, "Do you think you could enjoy your happiness with him whilst you knew that my heart was broken, that every hour in which you were rejoicing in his presence was an hour of agony to me?"

But in the end the entreaties of her lover, the persuasions of father and sister, and the weakness of her own heart, triumphed, and she consented to become Lady Ryvendale. To Alsager the promise of the future seemed written in letters of gold. How could he but be happy, with this fair, good woman ever at his side, to prompt the nobler part of his nature, to keep down the base? What he felt for Osyth was not the passionate worship he had given to Viva, but something calmer, truer, more likely to be lasting.

Just before the marriage, an incident occurred that went near to destroy all his hopes. A few days previous to the event, there was an announcement in the "Times" that the Duc de Lallière had met with a serious accident. He had been thrown from his horse, had fallen on his head, and was not expected to live. Two days later, his death was announced. And now some little part of the retribution that he deserved fell upon Alsager. He knew that by every law of right and honor he ought to give up Osyth and marry Viva: had he not sworn to her, by every oath he considered sacred and binding, that if ever the blessed time arrived when he could make her lawfully his, she should be his wife? nay, why swear, when no prospect on earth could have seemed so joyful? He could not argue to himself that Osyth's claims were as strong,—that it would be equal treachery to give her up: he knew that if the duke's death came to her ears, no mortal power would persuade her to marry him. And his terror night and day was lest, by some unlucky chance, she should hear of it. But neither Osyth nor Riette ever read the newspaper, and the duke's name was quite unfamiliar to Mr. Sartoris, although he had probably heard it. No "kind friend" volunteered the information.

Gertrude Ryvendale saw the announcement, but was careful not to betray her knowledge, even to her brother-in-law. As

for Alsager, he was tormented by an agony of anxiety, and only breathed again when the words had been spoken that gave his darling to him until death them should part.

And now, having shown vice punished (in the woman) and virtue triumphant, should I, bring my story to a conclusion at this point, and wind it up with the trite and delightful ending of the stories of our childhood, "And so they lived happy ever after"? Happy ever after! What earthly union in the ken of mortal man ever reached that blessed climax? Ah me, my friends, there is but one bridegroom who can bring eternal well-being to us, and he is one from whom we shrink with deadly fear and trembling and loathing. It is he who rides the pale horse, whose face we dare not look upon, the waving of whose plumes strikes us with an icy chill; and he is called Death. And whether eternal bliss or eternal woe be in his gift, who knows?

I have received hints lately, and notably one from my American publisher, that I should do better if I infused a little more cheerfulness into my stories, and, above all things, if I brought them to a right happy and joyful conclusion. Every one is to be happy, marriage-bells are to peal their merry tunes, slippers and rice are to rain upon blissful couples, the delighted reader is to close the book with a warm, pleasant glow at his heart, and a feeling that, after all, it is a very jolly world. And, if I were writing for children or very young people, I should feel it my duty to put the bright side of life before them, and let them think, while they can, poor souls, that its paths are flowery and delightful, and that they have only to meet the heart that beats in unison with theirs to know Paradise here below. But, my friends, my publishers, my critics, it seems to me that if one write at all, one must write what one feels and knows; one must make effects follow causes; and that, in a story designed to appeal to human hearts and experiences, one must not transgress probabilities any more than one must have recourse to supernatural means, so freely made use of in fairy-tales, such as bringing black pudding down the chimney at an old man's wish, or making a hero invisible by means of an enchanted cap.

I have lived in the world nearly half the threescore and ten years allotted to humanity, and I know that grievous woes and

disappointments are the heritage of man, and that even those whom, as yet, God has not visited heavily, still know how the little petty carking cares of life prevent one's young ideas of happiness ever being realized. One looks forward, one looks back, but how rarely does one say, "I *am* happy."

This book is not written for young people; and, indeed, I would rather they should not read it. I would have all young people happy and merry and full of faith and hope: youth is the time to enjoy. But, for my own part, I confess that a book which is one merry-go-round of jollity and happiness possesses few charms for me: the pathetic parts, the parts that tell of the sorrows and disappointments of life, have a far greater fascination for me, because they speak to me in a language that I understand. And so, in spite of what I am told, I say, with all humility, "I am nothing if not natural. I must write as I feel, even though nine-tenths of my readers throw the book down unfinished, declaring that 'there are quite enough troubles in life, without having one's feelings harrowed up by imaginary woes.'"

But are any woes imaginary? Can the mind of the novelist conceive anything more grievous than stories of real life which come to our ears, or meet our eyes in the newspapers, every day?

Alsager was *not* happy ever after, any more than he deserved to be, any more than he would have been if he had deserved to be. For a short time, he lived in a lover's Paradise. Osyth was so sweet, so good, so amiable, that it would have been strange indeed for any one to live with and not to love her. BUT, after a month or two, though his affection suffered no diminution, he began to find that very goodness which had so charmed him, a little irksome. Irksome, because it necessitated his exercising considerable control over himself, that he might not offend the purity and goodness of the woman in whose society he lived, and was to live henceforward. Now, Alsager was a thorough man of the world, and accustomed to a certain latitude in speaking. No man could more thoroughly have detested or avoided coarse speech, but many things permit themselves to be said in society, especially the set in which he had mixed, if one only knows how to say them. And it must certainly be *gênant*, after you have been married some

time to a wife, to see her blushing painfully and averting her face with evident vexation when you good-humoredly regale her with a *bon mot* that you consider perfectly inoffensive; it is more than embarrassing to have her sobbing at your feet because you have incidentally, and very naturally, d——d your servant for having forgotten an important item of your luggage.

And although Osyth was the least censorious person in the world, she had lived so simple a life, and was so unaccustomed to the ways of men, never having mixed with any but her father, Sir George Desmond, and Otho, that she was constantly feeling hurt and shocked at Alsager's doings and sayings, and was seriously afflicted by things that would not have cost a woman of the world a second thought. On his part, Lord Ryvendale was used to women of the world,—they always understood him, and he them,—and he began to find it a serious nuisance to be forever on his good behavior. It dawned faintly upon him that a saint in theory was charming, but, in practice, not very good company,

When they returned to Ryvendale after the honeymoon, he had made an effort to be interested in her benevolent schemes; but visiting his poor personally was a bore: he did not know what on earth to say to them, and he hated being thanked and blessed, as a man invariably does hate it.

August had just commenced: he really was at his wits' end to think how he was going to get through the month. Excitement of some kind or other was positively necessary to him. In the first blush of his passion, he could have occupied some time in making love to his wife, but, devoted as she was to him, Osyth was not quite the easiest woman in the world to make love to: she lacked the "touch of earth" which, when united with modesty and refinement, is so fascinating to a man. For his punishment, Alsager began to contrast her in his heart, though as yet but dimly and faintly, with Viva. If it had not been for Riette, that long month, with nothing to do, would really have bored him very much. Riette was brimful of life and vivacity: she adored her brother-in-law, and was always delighted to fall in with his plans. He bought a horse for her and taught her to ride. Osyth was too timid to learn, but readily acquiesced in everything that gave pleasure to her husband and sister.

There were some heavy dinners to be got through. Their immediate neighbors were mostly dull and pompous,—very different from the set to which Alsager was accustomed. He was fastidious about the women he lived with; he liked them to be elegant, to be beautifully dressed, to make an impression by their appearance and conversation. No man had ever seen Viva without endorsing Alsager's good taste by finding her charming. And there was no denying the fact that Osyth knew and cared nothing for the advantages of dress, and that although she wore the costly toilets that he insisted upon, she was quite unable to carry them off. She always looked lady-like, but there was nothing to make her remarked. And Lord Ryvendale was a man who above all things would have liked to see his wife a queen of society.

In September he had resolved to have the house full, and to ask people who were more congenial to him than his county neighbors. But this only proved a source of vexation to him. His shooting was excellent, his dinners were unimpeachable, but he was perpetually harassed by the thought that his friends, especially the women, found it a dull house to stay in. It was from no lack of good will on Osyth's part; she was at the greatest pains to please every one, but she had not the art of entertaining. She could talk to the people in her own county about matters of local interest, but she had nothing in common with these fine ladies and gentlemen who talked a jargon of their own, who cared for nothing but scandal, flirtation, and dress, and who made allusions and remarks that put her to shame and confusion. Alsager read in his friends' faces that they thought his wife very good, but infernally stupid; the women were unceasing in praise to him of Lady Ryvendale's goodness, but in a manner that conveyed disparagement rather than admiration; in short, he felt overwhelmed with failure and disappointment. Ever since he came in to Ryvendale, he had had visions of making it the most charming house in the county; he had meant his entertainments to be cited, and invitations to them coveted, but now he felt, vexedly, that everything, instead of being brilliant, had fallen flat. As yet he did not blame Osyth: he only began to have an inkling that she was not quite the wife suited to him.

He managed to get through the winter with shooting and hunting, and they paid some pleasant visits. These he coud

enjoy, since he had no sense of responsibility, and it was delightful to meet one or two pretty women who still entertained a regard for him. He was entirely guiltless of any intention of flirting, but a leopard could as soon change his spots, or an Ethiopian his skin, as Alsager drop the caressing manner and expressive glances that all his life he had been wont to bestow upon a pretty woman. And Osyth, who was not naturally of a jealous disposition, saw it with unspeakable pain, trying bravely the while to defend him to her own heart. She thought of the duchess, and began to understand some of the agony she must have suffered. But she had a resource that Viva did not possess: she had her faith and trust in God: there was never a trial, or a pain, that she could not take to her Father in heaven and come away from his footstool consoled for. Before three months had passed, she was far more acutely conscious than Alsager that she was no wife for him, and that she would never have the influence over him she had believed and trusted.

Alsager consoled himself by thinking that a season in London would do wonders for his wife: when she mixed freely with the world, she would get rid of her primitive notions and be more like other people. She was to be presented by a great personage, and was in her turn to present Riette: they *must* have Riette with them, and in due course he intended to provide his pretty sister-in-law with a husband. Lord Fairholme was the man whom he had fixed upon in his mind for a brother. He had asked him down once or twice to shoot, and the young man had seemed to admire Riette, but had not given indications of any serious intentions. Could Alsager have known why he was, at present, impervious to female charms, he would have been somewhat surprised and doubtless but ill pleased.

In the summer, Lord Fairholme had taken his mother and sister to Switzerland. One morning, they were driving from Interlachen to see the ice-cave at Grindenwald. It was a delicious morning: the sky was one canopy of unclouded blue, which the tall mountains, some fertile, some barren, almost seemed to touch. The rapid river rushed through the valley, roaring as it went, and boiling round the great rocks fallen in its bed. The quaint-roofed bridges added to the picturesqueness of the scene. Had it not been for the gangs of children

who infested the road, pressing upon the travellers their strawberry bunches, milk, flowers, and wood carvings with more than the pertinacity of London street-beggars (when no policeman is within range), the drive would have been a thoroughly enjoyable one.

At a steep hill Lord Fairholme got out to walk. A carriage was coming in the opposite direction: there was not very much room for it to pass, and it drew up to the edge of the bank to wait. As he passed, the young man glanced at the occupants. The color flushed to his face: he half stopped, hesitated, raised his hat abruptly, and passed on.

And all this time he had fancied that he had forgotten her, —that he was cured of his infatuation. One glance at that fair, sad face has undeceived him. And she is free!

All that day, he is so absent that his mother and sister are at a loss to know what has come to him, and ply him with questions whether he has had letters containing good or bad news, or hazard to each other a thousand conjectures as to the cause of his strange mood. He goes mechanically through the ice-caves, which have scant interest for him, eats the regulation lunch at the inn, and seems to have only one idea in his head,—which is, to get back to Interlachen with all speed.

Who was the elderly man with her? Was she staying at Interlachen? Would she leave, now she had seen him? Naturally she must want to forget the past and all connected with it, since Ryvendale had treated her so scandalously. Would she listen to him now? And what would his mother say? Well, that was little matter: there was at this moment only one woman in the world for him.

As they drove up to their hotel, the gentleman who had been the duchess's companion was standing at the door. Evidently they were in the same house. Lord Fairholme retired to his room: he was in a state of suppressed nervousness and excitement: he felt he must see her; but how?

Dinner was over; it was getting late; the moon was coming up behind the snow mountains. Lord Fairholme went to fetch his cigar-case. A door on the landing opened, and he saw the duchess's companion come out. He half paused as he heard her voice.

"Shall you be long, Uncle Bernard?" And then the reply reached him:

"About half an hour, my dear."

The young man's brain was in a whirl. Should he, dare he go in unannounced? It might be his only chance of seeing her. Before Mr. Carlton's footsteps had died away, his resolve was taken.

He turned the handle of the door: his strong young hand trembled as though he were palsied; another moment, and he was in the room. He could see her plainly, for she stood in the window, and the moon fell upon her lovely face, but he was in shadow, and she thought it was her uncle returned.

"Have you forgotten something?" she asks, in the well-known voice that thrills every fibre of his heart.

"Do not be frightened!" he says, hurrying forward; "do not be angry with me!"

She is violently startled; her heart stands still for a moment; but she is not one of the women who scream, or cry out, when they are frightened.

"Do not be angry with me," he repeats, coming up close to her. "When we last met, I offended you. I hope you have forgiven me."

"Why do you remind me of the past?" she utters, in a low, trembling voice. "Cannot you understand how painful it is to me? It is unmanly" (with rising indignation) "to force your presence upon me, at a moment when I am alone and unprotected."

"Unprotected!" he echoes, in an amazed tone. "Do you think you want protection from me? Why do you imagine I am here, except to say, now you are free, and I can say it honestly, all that I once said to you before? Until to-day, I thought I had forgotten you; now *I know* that I shall never love any other woman but you, as long as I live."

Viva stands as if in a dream. Is he sincere? or is he covering some base thought with fair words? She looks at him, and there is that in his honest, eager eyes which forbids her to distrust him. The impulse of her heart makes her stretch out her hand to him. He covers it with kisses.

"No," she says, essaying to draw it away; "do not misunderstand me! there can never be anything between us: only I thank you for what you have said. It is very noble of you."

"Noble!" he says, impatiently: "do not say anything so absurd! I have never seen any woman to compare with you.

I love you from the bottom of my heart, and I should be proud to call you my wife."

A feeling of pleasure steals into Viva's heart. It is sweet to her, after having drunk to the dregs the cup of humiliation, to have the true love of an honest man offered her. She raises her sad, beautiful eyes to his face.

"I would not let you make the sacrifice, even if I could," she says, softly. "You little know what you ask. But no power on earth would make me marry again. There is but one man in the world whose wife I could have been, and he" (the hot blood dyeing her cheeks),—"he has made it impossible."

"Do you distrust all men because one has behaved like a blackguard to you?" cries the young fellow, hotly.

She pauses for a moment, then says, slowly,—

"I do not think men mean to be false. When they make the oaths that mislead and delude women, it is because their passion misleads and deludes them; afterwards, they find it irksome to keep their vows, and society and the world encourage them to break them. Oh, no! I think there are very few men base enough wilfully to betray the woman who trusts them entirely."

"But between you and me, who are both free," he pleads, eagerly, "there can be no betrayal or misunderstanding. In a week, or less,—in the very shortest time that it is possible,—only consent, and you shall be Lady Fairholme."

She shakes her head.

"I do not thank you the less because it is impossible," she says.

And then the door opens, and Mr. Carlton comes in. It is no feigned surprise with which he looks from Viva to her visitor.

"This is an old friend, Uncle Bernard," she says, in a natural, self-possessed voice: "Lord Fairholme."

After a few friendly words, the young man takes his leave.

When he comes down in the morning, Mr. Carlton and his party have left Interlachen. There is a line for him from Viva:

"I leave to avoid you. You will, I know, have too much good taste to follow me."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### CONVINCED AGAINST HER WILL.

In the whirl in which he lives, it is not often that Sir Otho has either leisure or inclination to think. But on the night of his visit to Eaton Square, having put Mrs. Fairstar into her brougham, after the theatre, he, instead of going to any of his usual haunts, retires to his own rooms, and, lighting a cigar, gives way to meditation. The very sight of Riette has put him in mind of old times,—times almost forgotten, he had thought, but that come back readily enough, now he is willing to remember them. It was very pleasant, after all, the life that seems so tame, so peaceful, so primitive, compared with the life he leads now.

He sees again the quaint rectory, with its big cedar and old-fashioned garden, and the silvery bend of trout-stream lying below. He sees the rector, pacing the broad gravel walk, with a meditative expression on his benevolent face, as though he were thinking how best he should make his gospel sound good news in the ears of his weary, erring sheep; he sees Osyth, sweetly intent upon the pleasure of others; he sees Riette, arch and bright, full of quips and pranks and wiles. There comes back to him, distinctly, the day on which Lord Ryvendale made his first appearance in church, and he pauses to wonder how such a man as he could have won so pure a heart as Osyth's. Men cannot see other men with women's eyes, any more than women can understand the charm some of their sex have for men. Lord Ryvendale did not seem to Otho a man to win a woman's love,—least of all, a good woman's. Then he thought of his talk with Riette under the cedar, and their walk together in the hot summer afternoon, and the little episode of the forget-me-nots. How miserable he was during the week that followed, how jealous of Charlie, how sulky, how divided between love and hate of the capricious little creature whom he had suddenly discovered

he adored! And that wretched morning, when he had put his fate to the test, and lost it all, and gone away, thinking his heart was broken, and determined to forswear the sex for good and aye! A smile curves Otho's lips; it would be difficult now, he thinks, to make him take a pet at the sex; if one frown, there are plenty who will smile. And that sends his thoughts wandering off to "Laura." Poor little woman! What a wretched fate is hers, to be tied to an unappreciative brute like Fairstar! Otho had dined with them to-night, before the theatre, and the husband seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of sarcasm for his unhappy wife; he had brought out, with a Satanic pleasure, all her weak points; he had actually irritated her into showing temper, and her lovely eyes had been full of tears, and her pretty little nose pink with suppressed emotion, whilst he (Otho) had been obliged to sit a silent spectator of this brutality, although there was a cut-glass decanter at his elbow. And she had said pathetically to him afterwards, "Oh, Otho! if circumstances had been different! if Fate had been kinder, I might have met you first" (*entre nous*, the fair Laura is at least four years his senior),—"you, who are a man of heart, and who would have made *any* woman happy, even if you *had* found out she was not quite perfect."

"And so I would, by Jove!" says the young fellow to himself, with a pleased throb at his heart.

"But," continued Mrs. Laura, "I have thrown myself away upon one who" (with a little sob) "is utterly indifferent to me, who *hates* me, I believe. And now, even if I meet any one whom I know I *could* have loved, I dare not even think of him, because it would be wrong."

(Poor, pathetic, little Mrs. Fairstar! no fear of her ever compromising herself beyond redemption in the eyes of society!)

And Otho, with a quick, generous beating at his heart, worthy a better cause, had longed to comfort and console this ill-treated angel, and would have been quite capable of an imprudence for her sake, if the distressed one had permitted the sacrifice.

Somehow, although the young fellow is rather proud to believe himself the victim of a fatal and hopeless passion, his thoughts on this evening do not dwell very long upon "Laura," but take themselves back to the friend and playmate of his

youth. He had said to himself only this very morning that no doubt, if he were to see her now, he should be inclined to laugh at his infatuation. But he has seen her, and has not found much cause to deride his former choice. She is very pretty, even considered by the standard of prettiness which experience enables him to judge by to-day, and there is a freshness about her which is a great charm, apart from any consideration of beauty. The white dress she wore bore no clumsy evidence of rustic manufacture: its very simplicity was an art. The fit gave him an impression of Élise: he was beginning to know something about these things. Alice Courtland was not half so well dressed: Ryvendale's generosity, possibly. How enthusiastically she had spoken of him! and Otho frowns at the reminiscence. He is rather glad he is going to dine there on Sunday,—it is pleasant to see an old friend again,—but let her never flatter herself that he will waste his sighs upon her more. No doubt she is sorry enough now for having thrown away her chance of him. Lady Desmond, with a town house, and two country-seats, with diamonds, and horses, and a "Worth" dress for every week in the year, to say nothing of a devoted and kind husband, such as Laura had justly prophesied he would make,—not many girls would have thought twice about accepting so unique a position.

While Sir Otho is conducting his monologue in St. James's Street, two fair young damsels are engaged in a dialogue in Eaton Square, of which he is, if not solely, at all events the principal subject.

Alice Courtland and Riette are great friends, but even if they had a less degree of affection for each other they would probably have brushed out their hair in company previous to retiring to rest. Ladies always perform this rite, both in novels and out of novels; there is some potent spell about it that opens their hearts and unseals their lips, and for which, I believe, men have no equivalent, not even their cigars.

Riette has glorious hair, long, wavy, abundant; it is a sight to see her toss her little head and send the rich mass flying backwards. I tremble to think what Mrs. Fairstar would have said about her. Hair is not Laura's strong point, but she has a clever maid, and all that is needful to supplement nature, so that in a drawing-room no one would guess Riette's superiority. She once made her husband laugh immoderately

by saying, in her little, innocent way (this in the early days of their union), "Do you know, Franky dear, I really don't think *nice* women have those Mrs. S. Allen's heads of hair. If you notice in picture-galleries, it is always Magdalens and those sort of women who have such enormous, *unnatural* quantities."

And, though the *gentle* critic flay me alive for my "ignorance of the commonest rules of grammar," I affirm that Mrs. Fairstar, who had received an expensive education and mixed in good society, said *those* sort of women, and not *that* sort of women, as of course she ought to have done.

Alice Courtland had very fair, fine silky hair, so that it made a very poor show beside Riette's, but at the present time there was no rivalry between the two, and both were cordially ready to see and acknowledge each other's good points. Alice's features are more regular than her friend's; she is taller, and has a far more imposing carriage. Indeed, as Lord Ryvendale had remarked about her, "if you wanted a wife for state occasions, to sit at the head of your table, to show off your family diamonds, and to look the part thoroughly well, you could not do better than choose Alice. She would make a capital princess, if nothing more than to smile and bow and look gracious were required of her. But for my own part," he added, "unless I were a Turk, or the Emperor of China, allowed to marry several brides on one day, there are few women I would not rather take to wife. Fancy a honeymoon with her!"

Alice has more to say in private than in company, and is not altogether so stupid as people give her credit for being.

"Did you ever see any one so altered as Sir Otho?" she asks her friend, the very moment the door has closed upon her maid.

"Altered?" repeats Riette, interrogatively, although she has been thinking of nothing, the livelong evening, but how handsome and manly Otho has grown.

"He was quite a boy when I last saw him," proceeds Alice, in her leisurely way. "I did not think so very much of him then; but now—I do not believe there is a handsomer man in London."

"Not Lord Fairholme?" asks Riette, perversely, though she is far from thinking him in her heart equal to Otho.

"Oh, no," replies Alice, decidedly. "But then Lord Fairholme is fair, and I do not like fair men. But of course" (with a little smile) "it is natural that you should not admire Sir Otho as much."

Riette feels the color mounting to her cheeks, and, with a rapid movement of her hand, draws a thick veil of hair before them, making pretence of assiduous brushing.

"Why should I not?" she inquires, in a slightly exasperated tone.

"Oh, if two men are both handsome, and you like one very much and the other not particularly, why, of course you would give the preference to the former."

Riette flings her hair back from her face, and stops with her brush in mid-air. She really does not know at which accusation to be most outraged, that of liking Lord Fairholme very much, or Otho not particularly.

"I not like Otho particularly!" she cries, having decided upon the latter charge as conveying the greater offence, "when we were brought up like brother and sister. Why, I am *devoted* to him!"

"And yet you have not seen him for nearly two years," remarks Alice, slyly.

"That is because he has never been to Helmstone since poor Sir George died: the associations were too painful."

"Poor young man!" says Alice, with an impenetrable face: "he must be very tender-hearted."

Riette is quite sure that Alice means something more than she says.

"If he were to ask me to become Lady Desmond, I should certainly accept him," continues Alice, placidly.

"I hope he will, then," answers Riette, but whilst the words are yet in her mouth, her heart smites her. She does not hope anything of the sort, and she remembers, with an uneasy feeling, how she had tried to persuade Otho to fall in love with Alice. She proceeds to take a critical survey of her friend from behind the ambush of her locks. Alice is leaning meditatively back in her chair, in an unconsciously statuesque pose. She reminds one of a very well executed Dresden figure, with her chiselled features, her pink-and-white complexion, her china-blue eyes, her rounded arms, bared to the elbow.

In a second Riette takes an inventory of all these charms, and is dolefully smitten by a sense of inferiority.

"I am only a little dolly thing beside her," she says to herself; "and what man could possibly be so foolish as to prefer a doll to a statue?"

"I hope he will," echoes Alice. "Fancy a man being so eligible, and so handsome and nice into the bargain!"

"I should never care for a man for what he had," says Riette, feeling a little sore.

"But it would not be a drawback to him to be rich, would it?" asks Alice, demurely. "Oh, Riette! I wonder how you could be so silly."

"What do you mean?" cries the girl, startled.

"Oh, I dare say you think I do not know all about it. Every one fancies I am stupid because I have so little to say; but sometimes I find out things that mamma and other clever people never guess at."

"You are talking in parables, Alice," says Riette, feeling very uneasy.

"Am I?" asks Miss Courtland, imperturbably. She has not stirred from her Dresden attitude, nor is the expression of her face one whit altered, except that the smile on it has deepened just a shade.

"Well, I suppose I must expound my parable. Sir Otho, Otho without the Sir, then, was in love with you, and you behaved badly to him: that is why he has never been back to Helmstone."

Riette is aghast. Certainly she never gave her friend credit for so much perspicacity.

"People always consider you stupid if you do not talk much," continues Alice, in rather an aggrieved voice: "they never seem to reflect how much more time the silent ones have to use their eyes and ears."

Riette gives a little shudder. If Alice is, after all, going to turn out clever as well as beautiful, it will be too much for anything, she thinks.

"Of course any one can imagine whatever they please," she says, lamely and ungrammatically (it is really surprising, when you come to think of it, how ungrammatically people do talk), "but that does not make it true any the more."

"No," assents the Dresden figure, and then relapses into silence, as though content to relinquish the discussion.

Riette eyes her friend mistrustfully for a few minutes; then she says, in a plaintive tone,—

"Now, I know you think I shall never feel comfortable with you again."

Alice laughs a low, soft laugh. It is most unusual for her to do anything more than smile, but she is developing new qualities every moment to-night. Riette wonders, a little jealously, if Otho has anything to do with it.

"You are very flattering," says Miss Courtland, quite good-humoredly. "Never mind, dear; I will forgive you if you will take Lord Fairholme and let me have Sir Otho."

"People who think so much are not always sure to be right," replies Riette, maliciously. "Lord Fairholme has no more idea of marrying me than—than I have of marrying him, if he were to ask me."

"Indeed?" says Alice, in a tone of calm unbelief.

"Yes, indeed! and I could prove it to you, only it is a secret."

"A secret? then do not tell me. I hate secrets. I was never curious about anything in my life."

"He is devoted to some one else," says Riette, quite unable to resist her friend's indifference: "he told me so at Ryvendale. There is some mystery about it, but she is very beautiful, and he is very unhappy about it, because he says it can never come to anything, but he will never care for any one else."

"Perhaps he only said that to make you take more interest in him," suggests Alice. "I do not believe in people being broken-hearted because they cannot marry the person they want to. I should say to myself, 'Well, if I cannot have him, there is the end of it.'"

And there is no doubt that the Dresden figure is genuinely expressing her feelings.

"How cold-blooded you are!" cries Riette, with some indignation. "Now, *I* can perfectly understand any one being broken-hearted, if they could not get the person they loved."

"Can you?" remarks Alice, yawning. "Come, dear, it is time we were in bed. I am sorry to be so inhospitable, but I must turn you out." Then, as Riette is going, she adds,

"Speak a good word for me to Sir Otho if you have the chance. I quite like him; but I shall not break my heart if he does not see it in the same light."

Riette does not fall asleep the instant she puts her head on the pillow, as is her wont. She begins by taking herself to task for having a kind of dog-in-the-manger feeling towards her friend about Otho. Of course she does not want him herself, —what an idea! and she is really fond of Alice, but she does not think her quite good enough for Otho, now he has grown so nice and so handsome. He may fall in love with her; there is no doubt she is very pretty; and Riette sighs. She is glad he is coming to dine on Sunday, and hopes Lady Courtland will not keep him all to herself, as she did to-day.

It happens that, the next day, Lady Courtland's sister comes to lunch. She is a widow, and spends most of her time in London. As talkative as her sister, she is less discreet, and every now and then has to be called to order by her ladyship, because she will talk as though there were no young ladies present whose youth and modesty entitle their ears to be respected. The conversation turns upon Otho.

"Such a pity," says Mrs. Warren, "that he has taken up with Laura Fairstar."

Alice and Riette eat their lunch assiduously, but their pretty little ears open to the widest extent.

"What! the wife of Mr. Fairstar in the Foreign Office?"

"Yes: people always protest there is no harm in her, because she puts on such innocent, babyish ways; but I should be sorry for either of *my* boys to have anything to do with her."

"And you don't mean to say that Otho has fallen in love with her?" cries Lady Courtland, her curiosity getting the better of her discretion.

"Head over ears: he is a perfect slave to her,—always with her, morning, noon, and night."

"But what does the husband say?"

Mrs. Warren shrugs her shoulders expressively.

"Oh, I suppose he is one of the wise men who do not care to see too much."

Riette's heart throbs with indignation. She does not believe for an instant that Otho could be so wicked as to like a married woman: it is all an invention of this odious, scan-

dalous Mrs. Warren, whom she disliked before, and detests now.

Lady Courtland thinks it time to change the subject, and the two girls make their escape as soon as lunch is over.

"Alice!" cries Riette, in hot indignation, the moment they are alone, "do you believe a word that your aunt said about Otho?"

"H'm!" says Alice, pinching her lips together. This is her third season.

"What!" exclaims Riette; "you believe he could be so wicked, so horrid!"

"Certainly things never lose by carrying," observes Miss Courtland, sententiously, "especially with Aunt Margaret. But I know Mrs. Fairstar flirts, because I have seen her. She gets more attention paid her than most girls. It is a great shame."

"I won't believe it of Otho unless I see it with my own eyes," says Riette, with immense vivacity. "If it is true, he would not be worthy a thought."

"I don't know," remarks Alice, reflectively. "It is better than if he were in love with a girl. At all events, he cannot marry Mrs. Fairstar."

"If it is true, I shall never like him again,—never!" exclaims Riette, emphatically.

That very afternoon, as they drive through the Park on their way to Queen's Gate, where Mrs. Warren lives, the two girls simultaneously catch sight of Sir Otho.

He is leaning across the rails, talking eagerly to a pretty, fair woman in a well-appointed victoria. He is saying a great deal with both lips and eyes, and is far too much engrossed to remark the Courtland barouche or its occupants.

Alice smiles serenely; Riette feels the color mounting to her cheeks; she is conscious of a painful sensation that she is unable to define.

"There!" exclaims Mrs. Warren, triumphantly, to her sister. "Did I not tell you so? Another time you will believe me, perhaps."

"Is that Mrs. Fairstar?" asks Lady Courtland.

"Yes, that is the fair Laura."

"I have no patience with married women forgetting themselves in that way," remarks Lady Courtland, crossly. She is not a match-maker, but it has certainly occurred to her, since

yesterday, that it would be very nice if Sir Otho were to fall in love with Alice.

When they return from depositing Mrs. Warren, the victoria is still in the same place. Otho, apparently finding the railings an obstacle, has put himself the other side of them, and is now standing with one foot on the step of the carriage, supporting his elbow against the hood. This time he sees the Courtlands, and ducks his hat to them with a pleasant smile. It is quite evident that he is unconscious of committing any enormity.

Lady Courtland and her daughter smilingly return his salute, but Riette, with a hot blush on her indignant face, looks the other way.

---

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### PELION ON OSSA.

Sir Otho has a distinct feeling of pleasure as his brougham stops at the door of No. —, Eaton Square, on the Sunday evening. In spite of Mrs. Fairstar, he has been thinking a good deal about Riette the last two or three days, and longing to have a chat with her about the dear old times,—the pleasant part of them, at least.

He is not a little surprised when, on entering the drawing-room, the young lady gives him the coolest of greetings, and turns again immediately to Lord Fairholme, who is standing beside her. Otho is not in the habit of being snubbed; and what possible motive can Riette have for such behavior to him? He is far from connecting it with Mrs. Fairstar. In the first place, he is not conscious of any sense of guilt with regard to that lady, and in the second, he has no idea that Riette can even have heard her name. With a justly irritated feeling, he turns from her, and devotes himself entirely to Miss Courtland for the remainder of the evening. She receives his attentions in a very different manner,—smiles upon him, and exerts her small conversational powers to the uttermost; and, as Otho has plenty to say, they really get on admirably. Riette watches them furtively from time to time, her heart

swelling with indignation. It is very wrong of Alice, she thinks, to encourage and seem so pleased by his attentions, when she knows how culpable he is with regard to Mrs. Fairstar. Every girl of spirit ought to show, by her behavior to him, what she thinks of such conduct. I am afraid that if poor little Riette's heart could be analyzed there would be found, over and above her righteous indignation, a decided feeling of jealousy. She would not have admitted it for the world, and was quite certain that night, when she bade her friend a cool good-night, and declined the hair-brushing *séance*, under pretext of fatigue, that all she felt was regret at Alice's want of self-respect in sharing Otho's attentions with a person like Mrs. Fairstar.

Otho, on his part, was extremely ill pleased at Riette's vivacity and familiarity with Lord Fairholme. He declared to himself that she was positively throwing herself at the fellow's head, and that he was really quite *sorry* to see such a sweet, modest little creature as she used to be, developed into an unblushing coquette. Each was so indignant with the other that they positively glared at each other as they said good-night. Riette would hardly give her hand; Otho seemed scarcely to care to take it: between them they nearly dropped it.

Sir Otho sent away his brougham and walked home, abusing Riette all the way he went. Riette, as we have seen, turned her back upon Alice and vindictively brushed her hair alone, feeling now and then as if her own head were Otho's, and punishing it accordingly.

How nice Lord Fairholme was! she almost wished he had not that unhappy attachment; really, Alice was a girl without a grain of spirit,—no doubt she would marry Otho if he asked her, a thing quite impossible for a right-minded girl to contemplate; and as for Otho (with exasperation), his effrontery was too audacious: oh, how different he was from the *nice, dear* Otho of former days, whom she had been so fond of! He may be handsomer, no doubt he is, but what are looks in comparison with other nobler qualities? Thus Miss Riette, in angry judgment. I believe she shed a few tears, solely of sisterly grief, at the falling off in Otho.

Two days later, the Courtland party were at the Opera. Who should come into the box immediately facing them but

Mrs. Fairstar?—Mrs. Fairstar, looking exceedingly pretty, attired all in white, and cavaliered by Otho. True, there was another lady of the party, but, by the manner in which, from the very first moment, she riveted her attention upon the stage, it was perfectly clear what was the object of her presence.

Sir Otho did not at first see the Courtlands, but, had he done so, it is extremely improbable that he would have neglected any of his wonted attentions to the fair Laura, would have uncloaked her less carefully, or been less solicitous about her footstool and her glasses.

Lady Courtland, her daughter, and Riette sat in front of the box; Sir John and Lord Ryvendale were behind them; Lord Fairholme was expected. Lady Courtland, not a match-maker for her own daughters, was very kind and thoughtful about other girls, and seeing Lord Fairholme take evident pleasure in Riette's society, was constantly giving him opportunities of meeting her. And the young man, finding something very fresh and charming about the wild country rose, and having satisfied his sense of honor by confiding his hopeless passion for another to her, was always glad to be in her company.

Riette willed not to look in the direction of Otho and Mrs. Fairstar, but there was something stronger than her will which might perhaps be put down to the law of attraction. She could not help seeing jealously that the fair head was far more often turned away from the stage than towards it, and that Otho himself seemed to pay no attention whatever to the performance. The proximity of the white sleeve to the black one outraged her sense of propriety: once she could almost have sworn to seeing a well-shaped, manly hand steal towards a little, white, jewelled, ungloved one.

At the end of the first act, two or three men entered the box, and Otho came round to visit the Courtlands. Having had a good many things to think of, he had almost forgotten his grudge against Riette. Not so the young lady. She had had leisure for reflection, and her wrath had lost nothing by nursing. Result, *même jeu*. Otho advances, smiling cordially; Riette receives him with a happy mixture of coldness, defiance, contempt: angry passions rise again in both hearts. If Riette had not refused him, if she had ever shown anything but indifference to him, he might have put down her behavior to-

night to jealousy of Mrs. Fairstar; but he had not the faintest idea that she had any regard for him, not even a glimmer of the sisterly affection she had once given him. Poor fellow! how on earth was he to know what the capricious little damsel did not know herself yet,—that she was falling violently, desperately, miserably in love with him?

Again Otho falls back on Alice; again Alice receives his advances with open arms. Sunny, sweet-tempered Riette hardly knows which of the trio to be most furious with, Otho, Alice, or Mrs. Fairstar. She is beginning to take Love's fever very badly. When Otho has left the box without offering to shake her by the hand, tears positively come to her eyes.

Mrs. Fairstar, although she has seemed to be engrossed in conversation with her visitors, has not failed to make herself acquainted with Otho's movements. Like most women of her calibre, whilst claiming unbounded freedom for herself, she exacts unswerving fidelity from her slaves, and though she is far too clever to let the victim's chain gall him, she has her own way of drawing it tighter round him when he crawls a little too far away. When Otho returns to her at the commencement of the second act, she asks him, smilingly, who those pretty girls are to whom he has been talking.

"They are pretty, aren't they?" he says, looking rather eagerly across the house, and not giving her question a direct answer. "Which do you think the prettier?"

Mrs. Fairstar surveys them with her glass from behind the curtain. She will not commit herself to a reply until she knows whether Otho has a preference for either. If he has, she will decide against that one.

"Are they sisters?" she asks. "They are not at all alike."

"Oh, no! no relation. The very fair one is Miss Courtland; the other is Riette; you have heard me speak of her,—we were brought up together. Ryvendale married her sister."

"Oh!" utters Laura, with a depreciating accent; "a clergyman's daughter, I have heard. Rather a poor match for him, was it not?"

"She was a great deal too good for him, I know that," says Otho, a little sharply for him.

"Ah, yes!" (indifferently). "And that is her sister? Is she nice?"

Otho wants nothing better than to expound his grievance,

and, with that extraordinary want of tact which, as a rule, characterizes his sex, is only too ready and willing to make Mrs. Fairstar his confidante.

"She used to be nice,—awfully nice," he says, eagerly. "I don't mind telling you, I was desperately in love with her, and she threw me over for a friend of mine."

"*Threw you over!—that girl!*" says Laura, with the most accented surprise. "My dear Otho, you are joking!"

From that moment she detests Riette. Otho is pleased; he likes to be appreciated, and he certainly has wondered very much himself at Riette's want of taste.

"I was awfully cut up about it," he proceeds, weakly fancying his auditor interested and sympathetic. "I have never seen her since until last week, when I met her unexpectedly at the Courtlands'. And I cannot think what on earth has come to her. She will hardly speak to me, and treats me as if I had behaved badly to her, instead of she to me. Fairholme seems to be always with her," adds Otho, in an aggrieved tone; "but that is no reason why she shouldn't have a civil word for me."

"I suppose your uncle was alive when she refused you," suggests Laura, unintentionally displaying the cloven foot.

"Oh, it wasn't that," answers Otho. "She isn't the least bit mercenary. The man she threw me over for hadn't a sixpence. She was the sweetest, dearest little thing you ever saw. I always meant to marry her when she was old enough."

Mrs. Fairstar is not at all delighted by Otho's confidences; she feels personally aggrieved that he can speak of any other woman flatteringly in her presence. For the moment she positively dislikes him.

"And you are still in love with her?" she says, looking searchingly at him.

"Well, no!" he answers, hesitating; "but I suppose I shall have to marry some day, and" (with emphasis) "I shall never care so much for any girl again."

Laura is a clever actress. She withdraws gently behind the curtain, and Otho sees that her lips are quivering, and that there are tears in her eyes.

"What is it?" he whispers, eagerly, and I am afraid he adds some endearing epithet.

"It is nothing," she murmurs, becoming more agitated.

The curtain shelters her from the house, and she knows that her companion will not look round. "It is very foolish, very wrong, very *wicked* of me to mind your liking any one else. I can't help it; I will try to get over it; of course you will care for some one, of course you will marry, and" (with a little gasp) "I hope you will be very, very happy,—as happy as you deserve."

Otho is young and impetuous and warm-blooded, therefore I shall certainly not chronicle nis reply. Suffice it to say that Mrs. Fairstar produced the effect she intended, and that Riette had very little share of his thoughts for the rest of that evening.

Fate had evidently determined to make Mrs. Fairstar a thorn in Riette's side; she was constantly meeting her in company with Otho, and it seemed to take all zest and enjoyment out of the season to which she had so eagerly looked forward. If only poor dear Osie had been in town, she would have been able to talk seriously to Otho and point out to him the error of his ways (for Riette persuaded herself that it was entirely sorrow for his cast-away condition that made her feel as she did towards him). Sometimes when she had not seen him for a day or two, her tender little heart melted towards him, but the moment he reappeared on the scene her pride took arms again, and she treated him worse than ever. Nothing would have induced her to mention Mrs. Fairstar to him,—that would be most immodest, most unmaidenly, she thought,—but, if he were not lost to all sense of shame, he ought to guess why she treated him so coolly.

Otho, for his part, could not keep away from her, in spite of her persistent snubs and Mrs. Fairstar's growing ascendency over him; he constantly joined the two girls in the Row, or went out of his way to meet them. He gave the Courtland party a great breakfast at his rooms, and a dinner at Richmond, but he always fell to Alice, and could scarcely get a word out of Riette. He was becoming exasperated, and was determined to know the reason of her behavior. Was it possible that she fancied he had anything to do with Charlie's infamous behavior to her? So he characterized it now.

The two girls grew more affectionate, but less confidential. Otho's name was scarcely ever mentioned between them. Alice was secretly afraid that Riette cared for him, and she

had made up her mind that, if she ever married at all, and Sir Otho asked her, she would certainly be Lady Desmond. But the Dresden figure did not lose a hair's-breadth of contour from the effects of the tender passion, nor did it take from her excellent appetite. Riette, on the contrary, was getting thin, as Lord Ryvendale did not fail to remark when he came up to London. He was constantly backwards and forwards from the Court; a sense of propriety forbade his leaving Osyth for more than a few days at a time in the precarious state of her health, but he found his home deadly dull. Since the accident, she had been in a nervous, wretched state, terrified at the least noise and suffering intensely at times. She scarcely moved from the sofa. But she was as patient as an angel,—always received Alsager with a smile, and tried hard to be cheerful and to suppress her nervous terrors in his presence. She urged him to leave her,—to go to London and amuse himself: when he left her she smiled, when he returned she smiled. How could he tell that she was broken-hearted when he went away, and a prey to maddening fears lest she should never see him again? He told himself, with secret irritation, that she was a cold-blooded woman,—that saints were charming in theory, but too good for every-day life; he missed Viva's passionate love that could not bear him to be absent from her a day, and contrasted the two women to Osyth's disadvantage. He judged by appearances, and did not know that the most demonstrative love is not in all cases the deepest.

Now he looked forward to another interest. Marriage in itself was a delusion and a snare; he might have known that from the experience of his friends; but who ever learns life's lessons by vicarious experience? Every man thinks once in his life that his lot is going to be different from that of other men. The most extraordinary part of the delusion is how men and women, previous to marriage, imagine they have the same tastes, the same opinions, the same sympathies, but no sooner is the knot tied than they see themselves as they really are, diametrically opposed in almost every wish and thought. Are the men fools and the women hypocrites, or *vice versa?* or is it a mutual delusion in which both parties are guiltless?

At all events, thought Alsager, there was one consolation

to be got out of marriage, and that was the hope of having children,—to live over again in them. When you are weary and world-worn, when you have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and paid the penalty, when you no longer hope or care for anything for yourself, when you have given up ambition, when you have ceased to believe in the power of a woman to make earth heaven, then it is good to have children, to see them bright and joyous and full of hope, as once you were, and to help them, if you can, to make a better thing of life than you have done.

That, Alsager decided, was the only pleasure and promise left to him; and that hope he had cherished most ardently up to the time of the terrible accident. He was assured that all might still be well, but he expected nothing but disappointment now. And disappointment in that direction would be most grievous to him. He was perpetually haunted by the thought of the lovely child who could never call him father—whom he would probably never see again, nor recognize if he did see him. For he conjectured that Viva had probably gone abroad with the intention of remaining there. Constantly he dreamed of her, and, in his dreams, she was always beautiful and fair and gracious as when he first knew her and she had taken so strong a hold of his heart. Selfishly, for his own sake, he had left her; he had pursued the phantom of a happy future; he had not cared what her sufferings might be. And now he was being punished by his own hand. He was still fond of Osyth, he had an immense respect for her, but he was forced to confess himself bitterly disappointed in his marriage. He had sought repose and only found dulness: what a fool he must have been to think a tame country existence could ever content him after a life of perpetual incident and emotion!

Osyth did not know exactly what was passing in his mind, but she knew that he was disappointed, and blamed herself for having yielded to his passionate entreaties. She wondered now how she had presumed to think that she, so unversed in the world's ways, could be strong enough to change the life, the very modes of thought, of a man like Alsager: even Riette, she felt, had far more influence over him, and knew better how to please him than she did. But she loved him with all her heart, loved him well enough to do or suffer any-

thing for his sake, loved him as Viva had loved him, as women do love some men,—God alone knows why!

It was a severe trial to Osyth that she was unable to spend the season in London,—not, we may be sure, for her own sake, but because Alsager and Riette had been so bent upon it. When her husband was away, her father came regularly every afternoon to dine and spend the evening with her. Sometimes she was too ill even to see him. If not, he would tell her about her poor, and they would make plans together for some one's benefit. Good actions were the food their kind hearts lived upon, and now Osyth had not only the will but the power to help, for Alsager was thoroughly liberal. I fancy that quality is as a rule possessed by men who have great influence over women, though there are plenty of generous, open-handed men who, as far as I know, no woman ever cared two straws about.

The rector was very lonely without his children. He missed Riette even more than her sister. Osyth might be in the house without your knowing it, except from an all-pervading sense of comfort, but you would sorely have missed Riette's ringing laughter, her bright face, her merry talk. The rector would not have admitted that he loved one better than the other,—in his heart, I think Osyth's virtues balanced fairly with Riette's brightness,—but he missed his younger darling more. The sun did not seem to shine so genially when she was not there; the strawberries had less flavor now she no longer prepared them; and the rector began, for the first time, to think that Helmstone was a dull, out-of-the-way place, after all.

---

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### MRS. FAIRSTAR'S MANŒUVRE.

MRS. FAIRSTAR has not the smallest intention of letting Sir Otho escape from her clutches at present. She will replace him when she can, for once a man has confided to her that he has an attachment for another woman, she no longer feels secure of nor takes any further interest in him. But he will not be

easy to replace. She may find other men rich and generous, but will they be satisfied with as little return as Otho? will they have the same chivalrous regard for her? will they think it enough honor to be flattered, and made use of, by a pretty woman?

She knows enough of young men to be aware that there are not many of Otho's age nowadays who share his respect for her sex, but then they have probably not been brought up with such girls as Osyth and Riette. Young men are very much what their mothers and sisters first make them, and later the women whom they love and with whom they associate. If a youth spends his early life in the society of pure, good women, no matter what his experiences in after-life, he will always retain a certain amount of love and respect for the sex.

Mrs. Fairstar reaped considerable benefit from the influence that the two young girls had left on Otho's mind. He was devoted, and he was not *exigeant.*

From the moment of his confession, she has hated Riette. That a girl who was not a beauty and "no one in particular" should have refused such a match as Otho, and have the chance (as she supposed) of being Lady Fairholme, was too exasperating! Mrs. Fairstar, having been "no one in particular" herself, had that bitter and intense dislike to seeing any one in the same position advance in the world that is common to women of her class. It so happened that she was two or three times thrown into the Courtlands' company when Otho was with her. She was not long in discovering Riette's secret, and from that moment laid herself out to enrage her more against Otho. Fortune soon gave her a brilliant opportunity. For the first time that season, the Courtlands and Otho were to meet at a ball given by a Southshire magnate. Riette had so far relented as to promise Otho a waltz, and, in her heart, was looking forward to it with a great deal of eagerness. She did not know that Mrs. Fairstar was to be a guest also.

The evening arrives. Riette is dressed betimes: her mirror has paid her a great compliment, and she is waiting, in a tremor of nervous excitement, for the carriage. Two lovely bouquets, a delicate attention from Sir Otho, have been rapturously received by the two girls, and both are looking for

ward to the ball as their temperaments dictate,—Riette with excited delight, Alice with calm but pleasurable anticipation.

"For once we shall escape that horrid Mrs. Fairstar, I hope," the latter remarks to Riette.

"Oh! you think her horrid, do you?" returns her friend.

"Only as far as Sir Otho is concerned," replies Alice, tranquilly. "Otherwise, she seems very nice and pretty."

They have entered the ball-room. Riette is radiant with delight: the flowers, the music, the light, captivate her senses; she treads on air. A Southshire acquaintance invites her for the first dance: in the midst of it, she sees Otho enter the room. He is looking very handsome and in the best of spirits: the girl's heart beats with pleasure at the thought that she is going to dance the next dance with him. She is very glad that, for once, her affection for him had got the better of her pride, and that she had consented to dance with him.

He has claimed her, is bending down to her and whispering,—

"Riette, you look positively lovely."

She smiles back in his face, genuinely happy at his praise.

"Do you think so?" she says, shyly.

Now, if Fate would have kindly interfered to give Mrs. Fairstar a bilious attack, or a red spot on her pretty nose, or in any way to have kept her away from this ball, I can see clearly what would have happened. Otho and Riette would have danced together, the music would have crept into their veins and intoxicated their young blood, their eyes would have met in mutual delight and confidence, and Love would have kindled a blazing fire in their hearts in less than no time. Otho would have led Riette into that dimly-lighted recess on the stairs, he would have said to her, "My darling, I love you more than ever. Do not be hard-hearted!—tell me that you will try to care for me," and Riette, dazzled, and all her pride undone by the witchery of the hour and the surroundings, would have confessed, "My heart is yours. I care for you far more than I ever did for Charlie. Only promise me one thing,—to give up that horrid woman, and never to speak to her again."

Otho would have promised on the spot. And then, if there had been no curious eyes within range, he——

However, this is only what might have happened. What actually does happen is as follows:

At the very moment that Riette raises her truthful, happy eyes to Otho's, and says, shyly, "Do you think so?" Mrs. Fairstar, like a bad fairy, but looking the image of a good one, all in soft clouds of white, and decked with pearls and diamonds, enters the room and intercepts the lovers' glances. The music is just commencing: another moment, and Otho's arm will be round Riette's waist.

But, before it gets there, Mrs. Fairstar is behind him, and whispers,—

"Otho!"

It is not such a whisper but that Riette catches it, as Mrs. Fairstar fully intends she shall. In a moment her face is aflame, her heart gives a great angry throb, and she relaxes her confiding pressure on Otho's arm. The young man turns: he really wishes the fair Laura elsewhere for the moment, but he is always courteous to a woman.

"Otho, I *must* speak to you at once. Make some excuse, and get rid of your partner."

And, whilst Otho, thoroughly bewildered, knows not what to say or do, Riette snatches her hand from his arm, and flies to Lord Fairholme, who happens to have just come in, and is standing in the doorway close by.

"Take me out for a minute!" she pants. "I am so hot."

And she has, indeed, such a flushed, excited look, that Lord Fairholme waits to ask no questions, but complies instantly with her request, and conducts her to that very recess where, later in the evening, if I had had my own way, Otho should have poured his declaration into her willing little pink ear.

"Oh, how glad I am I saw you!" she gasps, as he sits down beside her, having vainly begged her to let him get her water, or an ice, or champagne, or something.

"Why, what has happened?" he asks, in a kind, friendly tone, for he is very fond of this pretty, innocent little country-girl.

"I have been so insulted," she says, hardly able to refrain from crying.

"Insulted!" he echoes, a sudden warmth stirring his veins, as he feels that he may have to knock some man down, or horsewhip him, before the night is over. "Why, surely, I thought I saw you with Desmond——"

"That dreadful woman!" gasps Riette.

Lord Fairholme breathes again, and smiles.

"A woman?" he says. "Why, what can a woman possibly have said or done to you in a ball-room?"

Riette is in urgent need of a confidant, and has not Lord Fairholme told her all about his troubles? So, breathlessly, she pours out the terrible narrative:

"We were just going to begin—she came up behind him—*she called him Otho*, and told him he was to get rid of me, and that she must speak to him at once."

Lord Fairholme can hardly repress a smile. The most fearful enormity could not have been related in a more thrilling tone, with a more horrified emphasis.

He can give a tolerably good guess who *she* is, and he forms the impression that this pretty little girl must be very far gone about young Desmond to be so upset at such a trifling matter.

"Perhaps it is really something very important," he says, soothingly, "and, of course, she did not mean you to hear. And is it such a dreadful enormity for a lady to call a man by his Christian name?"

Riette looks up at him with solemn, wide-open eyes, and says, in an impressive voice,—

"*But she is married.*"

Lord Fairholme cannot for the life of him help laughing.

"What will you think of me when I tell you that several married women call me George?"

"But they knew you before they married?" says Riette.

"Perhaps that alters the case," returns Lord Fairholme, not wishing to enter into particulars. "And so then you fled and left poor Desmond. I don't quite see how he is to blame."

"But I do," utters Riette, pressing her lips together. "Now, *will* you do something for me?" (looking beseechingly at him).

"Of course I will, if it is not to shoot Desmond or take the lady to task for her behavior."

"You won't think me bold?" she asks, hesitating and blushing.

"That I am sure I shall not," he answers, heartily.

"This waltz is not over. Come and finish it with me."

He jumps up with alacrity. A minute later, they are fly-

ing together over the polished boards, and for one happy moment Riette forgets her wrongs. But as the music ceases, they come back to her with redoubled intensity.

Otho is standing in the doorway waiting for her. Had her companion been any other man than Lord Fairholme, he could have made his apologies and excuses with the best grace in the world, but now he is annoyed, and his manner is very stiff.

"May I have the honor of a moment's conversation with you, Miss Sartoris?" he says, as she passes.

Riette draws herself up and clings to Lord Fairholme's arm as though she were about to be torn from him by force.

"No!" she says, and that is the only word she vouchsafes him.

Otho is furious. To be treated in this manner before his rival, as he believes Lord Fairholme to be,—it is too bad! No doubt the other man is triumphing in his discomfiture.

Otho is completely ignorant of Riette's feeling about Mrs. Fairstar: in his indignation and jealousy, he chooses to imagine that she had been only too glad to throw him over, in order to dance with Lord Fairholme.

"Really," says the latter to Riette, as they traverse the corridor, "I think you are too hard on Desmond. He could not help the lady making the request. It is not as if he had left you standing there alone and gone off with her. I really don't see how he is to blame in any way."

"Don't you?" remarks Riette, significantly. "Well, never mind: we will not talk about him any more."

"But I want to talk a little more about him," says the young man, kindly. "Let us sit down here. Do you know" (very gravely), "I have heard of people spoiling all their lives by taking foolish fancies into their heads and acting upon them? Desmond is a very good fellow; you are old friends, I know: why on earth should you quarrel with him for such a silly thing?"

"I have known him all my life," says Riette, almost ready to cry, "and I would not have believed it of him."

"Believed what?"

"That he could be so wicked," answers Riette, averting her face.

"Wicked, my dear child? What on earth do you mean?"

"If it were any girl, I should be delighted: there is nothing

I should like so much as to see him happily married: we are all devoted to him," says Riette, talking very fast, and not adhering quite strictly to the truth; "but to be in love with some one who is married, it is too dreadful, too horrible to think of."

Lord Fairholme is rather at a loss. It won't do to make light of a flirtation with a married woman to an innocent young girl, and, if report speak truly, Sir Otho has been carrying on a pretty strong flirtation with the fair dame in question. No, he certainly must not tell her that such things go on every day and no one thinks a pin the worse (of the man, at all events), as long as there is no esclandre. He knows nothing of Sir Otho having wanted to marry Riette, and, if he has no serious thought of her, it would be a pity to foster false hopes in the girl's heart. His only course is to defend Otho against the supposition of being in love with Mrs. Fairstar.

"In love!" he repeats, after a short pause: "that is a very strong term for the attentions of a man to a lady."

"Attentions!" she echoes, scornfully. "Does a man go everywhere with any one? is he always at her beck and call? does he look at her and whisper to her as a man does when he is engaged to a girl? and is that only ordinary attention? Look there!" she whispers, suddenly dropping her voice.

At this unlucky moment, Mrs. Fairstar enters, leaning upon Otho's arm. She is looking up in his face, and there is, certainly, considerable expression in his eyes as he returns the glance. A tyro might easily be forgiven for thinking him very much in love with her, although Lord Fairholme does not jump to that conclusion. It has happened to him, before now, to say a great deal more with his eyes and lips to a pretty woman than his heart would have liked to be responsible for.

The two couples have seen each other, and three of the four immediately begin to act for each other's benefit. Laura desires to inflame the would-be lovers against each other; Otho is determined to show Riette that he can console himself for her bad behavior; and Riette is anxious to seem to ignore even his presence. Any one who had not the advantage of being able to read her poor mortified disappointed little heart might really accuse her of flirting with Lord Fairholme.

"Let us go," she says, shortly, to her companion; and he makes no effort to detain her, thinking that Mrs. Fairstar's *œillades* are not a very improving spectacle for her.

"Stay," he says: "you have forgotten your bouquet."

"Thanks, I do not want it," she answers, tossing it back on the seat. For has not Mrs. Fairstar the counterpart of it, only costlier, more beautiful? That it is so, is no fault of poor Otho: he has paid the same for all three, but the bouquetier, being a man of the world, has elected to send the choicest to the married lady.

"You won't surely leave it?" says Lord Fairholme, not understanding this little bit of caprice.

"I don't like the smell: it makes my head ache," she replies. (Oh! naughty, naughty little Riette!)

When they are gone, Mrs. Fairstar turns, with well-feigned penitence, to Otho.

"I am so dreadfully sorry!" she says; "I am afraid your pretty friend is angry with you. I did not see with whom you were dancing. Oh, I do hope she did not hear what I said!"

"What does it matter?" answers Otho, impatiently. "If she is so ill-tempered and so easily put out, she is not worth troubling one's head about."

"Perhaps she was not really angry," says Laura, soothingly, "Perhaps she only threw the bouquet away, thinking to please Lord Fairholme."

She has tipped her arrow well this time.

"I won't trouble her with any more, at all events," he returns, with exasperation.

And, lest she should repent and return for it, he goes over to the couch where the bouquet lies, and vindictively pulls it limb from limb, whilst Laura watches him with stealthy pleasure and purrs out soft remonstrances during the operation.

"I shall never forgive myself, never," she says, pathetically, "if I have been the cause, the most innocent cause, of sowing dissension between you and a girl you really care for. What can I do? If I could only explain to her; but how could a young, innocent creature like that understand my unhappy situation? No doubt her views of marriage are all rose-colored, like mine" (with a great sigh) "used to be. I would do anything, only, don't you understand, my dear boy, where the

difficulty is? If she cares for Lord Fairholme, my hinting anything about you would only make you look small; and" (with great energy) "nothing in the world would make me do that."

"Let him have her!" exclaims Otho, irritably. "She is a born flirt. She treated me shamefully once before, and I'll be hanged if she shall have the chance again."

"I suppose there must be something in it," remarks Laura, reflectively, "or she would hardly have fled to him in that wild sort of manner. It was a very *prononcée* thing to do in so public a place."

"Very," replies Otho, with bitter sarcasm. "I certainly never thought a time would come when she would have flown from me to another man for protection."

He is talking himself gradually into a rage, and rather losing sight of facts.

"It was silly of her," says Laura. "But I dare say it pleased Lord Fairholme."

She continues to harp well upon this string, being thoroughly aware of the irritation it causes Otho. The serving of her own ends apart, she is not sorry for the opportunity of punishing him for having dared to confess to her his love for another woman.

In spite of his wrath, Otho is compelled by gentleman-like feeling to claim Riette for the other waltz for which she is engaged to him. He presents himself stiffly, and, with a lowering brow, says,—

"I believe this is our dance?"

Riette looks at him with an angry glitter in her eyes.

"Thank you," she replies, scornfully, "I am engaged to dance it with Lord Fairholme."

Without a word he turns away.

Now, is it to be wondered at if, after this, he devotes himself to the sympathizing Laura for the rest of the evening? He wants to indulge his bitter mood and his wrath against Riette, and we may be sure his chosen confidante does not balk him, although she occasionally drops a soft sprinkling of oil on the blazing furnace. Time after time, poor, indignant, heart-sore little Riette sees that graceful couple go sailing down the room: both are so handsome, their step is so perfectly suited to each other, many dancers stop to watch them.

As the night advances, stimulated by his wrath, by frequent draughts of champagne, by the fascinations of his lovely companion, Otho succeeds in making himself the object of some remark. His conduct is decidedly reprehensible. When Mrs. Fairstar dances with other men, he stands moodily in a corner; he positively glares at Lord Fairholme when they come in contact.

As for Riette, she is filled with burning shame and indignation. To her innocent mind, Otho is disgraced for evermore: apart from her own wounded pride, she feels all the misery that a generous heart suffers when some one dear to it lowers and degrades himself. She does not know that the world will only smile, and shrug its shoulders, and say, "Young Desmond made rather a fool of himself to-night," but that tomorrow his folly will be forgotten, and the same world will bid him eagerly to its festivities, only too glad to secure him as a guest.

At last the torture comes to an end. Lady Courtland collects her bantlings and prepares to depart.

"Was it not a charming ball?" she asks of Riette, in the carriage. "I know one young lady who enjoyed it, at all events." And she gives the girl a kind little tap with her fan.

Lady Courtland has seen that Riette danced a great deal, and that Lord Fairholme paid her considerable attention.

Riette responds by a sickly smile.

Oh, how thankful she is those friendly eyes cannot read her heart, that is burning with anger, shame, and misery, with all her own mortification, with all her disappointment in and indignation against Otho! She will tear him out of her heart; she never wants to see him again.

When she reaches her room, and the maid has carried away the wreck of tulle that was as fair and fresh as her own heart five hours ago, and is equally symbolical of her feelings now, she flings herself down by her bedside and cries as she never cried in all her life before.

No wonder she looks ill and heavy-eyed next morning,—poor little love-lorn Riette!

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### "FORGOTTEN BY THE WORLD."

JUST on the outskirts of London, within a moderate drive of the clubs and theatres, stands a delightful old-fashioned house. Once inside the great brick walls which enclose the garden, you might fancy yourself a hundred miles from any city. There the birds carol out the joy of their hearts, and the roses lavish their sweetness on their wanton lover the wind; there you may be solitary, if you please, as though the gates of a nunnery locked you in, or there you may bid the brave and the fair to loiter on the velvet lawns, to pace the trim gravel walks, or to hide, in pairs, among the mazes of the luxuriant shrubbery.

The house is no less charming. Everything about it is quaint and old, though no modern comfort is lacking: the curious mirrors, the carved furniture, the tapestry and brocades, the rare old china, would fetch fabulous prices under the auctioneer's hammer.

This for the last eighteen months has been Viva's home. It is two years and a half since that morning when, with wet eyes and a breaking heart, she bent over Alsager and bade him the farewell that was to be forever. There is a certain sadness attendant on the thought that we are doing anything for the last time: as our eyes dwell upon some place that we know we shall never see again, a soft melancholy creeps into our hearts, and invests the spot, though we care not for it, with a momentary and fictitious interest. But when a woman bids her last good-by to the man who is the life of her life, the heart of her heart,—the man for whom she has sacrificed her present and her future, the man whose love has given her over to the world's scorn and made her such that she can never hold her head proudly among her fellows again, then indeed the parting must go nigh unto the bitterness of death. Nay, death

seems kind beside the dreary, loveless life that stretches out before her.

When first I learned this story, and began to plan in my mind how I would set it before you, I meant to follow my poor heroine through every phase of her shame, her agony, her repentance. But long ago I relinquished that idea. Words are so poor,—or I have not the gift of setting them forth. Perpetual harping on one string, all the more if it be a grievous one, must needs become wearisome. And so I prefer not to dwell upon Viva's agony after the parting,—her days of dumb misery, her despairing nights, her wild plans of going back to Alsager, of falling at his feet and beseeching him for pity's sake to let her stay with him, to be even the meanest of his servants, only not to send her away.

All you who are tender-hearted, even though you have not known a like grief, will, by a delicate intuition, be able to picture to yourself the agony of this poor stricken soul; and from those who are hard and unpitying, no words that I can pen would wrest sympathy.

So I pass over eighteen long months before I bring her back to you. She is not dead of a broken heart; her dark hair has not a thread of silver in it, sown by the ravages of grief; she looks quite young, as indeed she is, and smiles hover not unfrequently upon her fair face. But to Bernard Carlton, who watches her with the stealthy anxiety a man has for a fragile being whom he dearly loves, she looks like some pale rare flower over whose head a scorching blast has passed. When she coughs, as sometimes she does, he shivers: in his own heart he is quite certain she is not long for this world. She is too good, he thinks.

Since she has given up her sin, she has returned to her God: she has thrown herself back upon religion as her only comfort and consolation: with bitter tears, and self-abasement, and penitence, she has fallen before her Father's throne, and though she feels that a life-long devotion to God, to repentance, to good works, is insufficient to atone for her sin, she can yet take comfort from the remembrance of Christ's mercy to the penitent Magdalen.

For many months after Viva threw herself upon his protection, Mr. Carlton forbore to make any allusion to the past or the future: he contented himself with weaving plans for

the present to distract his unhappy niece as much as possible from her grief, and waited until a suitable opportunity should occur to hint anything about future prospects. From making constant sacrifices for her, he has grown to love her with a far deeper love than he had given her in her girlish days; she is fast becoming the one object of his life. No, not the only one: there is another, her child. So handsome, so bright, so winning was the boy that he very soon found his way to his great-uncle's heart, and, having once made his entrance, asserted himself right royally and tyrannically there.

One day, having long before decided in his heart what he meant to do, Mr. Carlton said to Viva,—

"My love, can you bear me to talk to you a little? I have something to say to you about our boy."

That was the way in which the noble-hearted man always spoke of the little fatherless child.

Viva gave a frightened glance at him. Always that theme was gnawing at her heart. She was constantly foreseeing a future, when he would ask about his father, and, later, a time when he would come to understand the truth and to despise her. Seeing her look, her uncle takes the chair beside her, and lays a kind hand upon her trembling ones.

"Of what are you afraid, my child?" he says, tenderly. "You are my nearest and dearest," he continues, after a moment's pause, "and, next to you, your boy. To make a long story short, I mean to make him my heir."

The poor mother looks at him as though she could scarcely comprehend.

"Your heir!" she repeats. "Bertie!"

In her voice there is a whole volume of expression. It says, What! this poor, nameless child, whose existence is a shame, a disgrace to you,—make him heir and representative of the family whose name you have always been so proud to bear?

Mr. Carlton smiles, and his face looks the incarnation of all goodness and benevolence.

"Yes," he says, "I wish Bertie to take my name, and I intend to make him my heir. When a boy has friends and good prospects, people forget to ask questions."

Viva bursts into a passion of tears: she is crushed, overpowered by this man's goodness.

When he has soothed her, and, after many tears and inco-

herent words, she has regained something of calmness, he says,—

"Since we are making plans, let us decide as much as we can of the future. You must not let anything I say hurt you, dear child: for all our sakes you must once bravely face the position and resolve what you will do."

"I will do whatever you decide upon," Viva answers, in a low, trembling voice.

"Nay," says Mr. Carlton, "I will *decide* nothing, but I will give you my opinion. Your future has cost me long and anxious thought. I want, if I can, to take you out of the past, so that in time you may almost forget it. And I want more: I want to make the world forget you. Forgive me, my dear, if I am forced to pain you for the moment. As the Duchess de Lalfière, wherever you go, even if you elect to live in the greatest retirement, your name and rank must always attract attention. And so I propose that you should drop both. If you consent to this, then comes the question what other you will adopt. I do not think it desirable that you should return to your maiden name; but it has occurred to me that if you were to take your mother's, and call yourself simply Madame de Feuil, you would be very much protected against the curiosity of those with whom you may come in contact. We can, I know, rely implicitly upon the discretion of our faithful Fletcher and Désirée. When Bertie becomes of an age to ask questions, we shall, I hope, be able to let him think, what it is most desirable he should think, that his father is dead, and that the subject is too painful a one for you to discuss. And now, my love, I have one more suggestion to propound to you, and after that I shall leave you to think over all I have said. For many years I have been a lonely man. Since I have had you and our boy for company, I feel as though it had given me a fresh lease of life: I should like to be always with you, and, if you do not find my society irksome, I propose that for the future we shall make our home together."

Viva looks up startled.

"Not at The Towers!" she utters, in a low voice.

"No, my dear. Not at The Towers. You may be quite sure" (laying a kind hand on hers) "that I shall suggest nothing that can cause you pain. Some day, perhaps, you

may not feel the same reluctance to revisit your old home, and, if that day should come, you shall be as free to go there as you now are to stay away. But I am thinking of another home. A friend of mine died a few months ago. She had a charming, old-fashioned house, standing in a lovely garden, a little way out of London: it was a house I always envied: you would fall in love with it at once."

"Near London?" says Viva, her face becoming troubled.

"Yes, but once inside the garden-walls you may fancy yourself a thousand miles away from a town. And the grounds are so large, that if you chose to shut yourself up in them, you would still have plenty of fresh air and exercise. And it would be pleasant for me to be within reach of my club."

This he says, not that he has any thought of himself, but because in time he hopes to wean Viva from her desire for solitude.

"The nephew," he continues, "to whom my poor friend left the place, has an appointment abroad, and it is thought the house would let better as it is than dismantled. I have the offer of it, and I am only waiting your consent to decide upon taking it."

Then Mr. Carlton went out, and left Viva to reflect.

She was not long in making up her mind. Did she not owe everything to her uncle? who could have been so divinely good as he had shown himself? She yielded to his wishes in every particular. When she went to her new home, it was as Madame de Feuil: the Duchess de Lallière had disappeared forever from the scene. Soon she became attached to the place, and took pleasure in her garden, and by and by she found out her poorer neighbors and devoted much time to good works. But she was resolute in declining any advances from people higher placed in the world. No visitor was admitted within the gates, nor did she return any call made on her. In the house, Fletcher and Désirée were safe guardians of her secret. They made no mystery. Madame was delicate; she had never recovered the death of her husband; and to those who saw her, that seemed sufficient explanation.

In time her uncle persuaded her to drive out, and she frequently took long drives, but never turned her face London-

wards. Sometimes Mr. Carlton brought a friend or two of his own sex to dine, and, to please him, Viva would be present during dinner and talk with something of her old charm and grace. She was devoted to her child, and it was strange how gentle and obedient this imperious young tyrant would be with his mother, whom he adored. Perhaps Fletcher and Désirée had inculcated the idea firmly in his young mind that he "must not grieve mamma": at all events, he repressed his wilfulness in her presence with a self-control surprising in so young a child. However, he fully indemnified himself by ruling his two slaves with a rod of iron, and his great-uncle into the bargain. To look at the bold, bright face of this young autocrat, no one would have dreamed of a bar sinister: to see the homage paid him by his satellites, one might have believed him heir to a dukedom.

Désirée was still maid and nurse. What exact position Fletcher occupied in the establishment, it would be difficult to state with precision, as there were, besides him, a butler and footman, and Mr. Carlton was very much given to waiting upon himself. Confidential servant to his mistress, slave, valet, and playfellow to Master Bertie Carlton,—whatever he was, Viva always declared he was the most useful person in the house, and the one whom, of all others, she could not possibly do without. He was still faithful to his affection for Désirée, and from time to time renewed his offer of marriage. Even Viva was on Fletcher's side, and pointed out that they could still remain in her service as man and wife; but Désirée only pursed up her lips and said there was always time, and she would see when Monsieur Bertie was grown a big young gentleman and no longer wanted his poor Zirée.

In spite of Viva's prohibition, Lord Fairholme had found her out. He had done more: he had even interested Mr. Carlton in his suit, and won him over to plead his cause. But Viva was resolute: never more would she call mortal man husband: her heart was divided between her child and her religion. Her life had been made shipwreck of, and never again would she venture from that calm haven where she had cast anchor, however fair the promise of sea and sky that sought to lure her. He might come sometimes to see her, as her friend, if he would relinquish all other thought or hope of her; if not, he was better away. And, thinking, like most

of his fellows, that "half a loaf was better than no bread," the young man came on the terms she dictated, and all the more because his passion was so hopeless he grew heart-sick for love of her, and found no charm in any other of her sex. He was a prime favorite with Bernard Carlton; and as for Bertie, he delighted in him, not only, I fear, for his own sake, but by reason of the showers of presents and bonbons that always accompanied his visits.

Never once had Lord Ryvendale been named between him and Viva; never once had any allusion been made to the past, as far as he was concerned. And faithfully had Lord Fairholme kept the secret of Viva's dwelling-place and of his occasional visits to her. It was a strange coincidence that in both houses he was a favorite guest,—at Ryvendale and at the old red house where Madame de Feuil had found an asylum. It had happened, once and again, that he had gone straight from seeing Alsager to Viva, and yet to neither had he breathed the other's name. Lord Ryvendale had ceased to think of him as a possible brother-in-law: he knew him to be the victim of some mysterious, unhappy passion, but he never dreamed for a moment who was the object of it. On that one subject George Fairholme, the frankest, most outspoken man in the world, was utterly silent. Still, though Lord Ryvendale no longer had designs upon him, he liked to have him for company and old acquaintance' sake. Sometimes Alsager would talk to him of the old times, and, though he did not absolutely confess as much, Lord Fairholme knew that he bitterly regretted Viva. He was always harping upon her boy, now that his hopes of an heir had been so bitterly disappointed. He was a father, but father to what? To a poor little deformed girl, who seemed to have but one spark of intelligence, or one might say instinct, which was to cling to her mother. And they gave him no hope that he would ever have another child so long as his present wife lived. For Viva's sake, Lord Fairholme would have been inclined to dislike the woman who had robbed her of all her hopes in life; but who could see Osyth and cherish one unkind thought of her? She was so sweet, so patient, so resigned; she bore her heavy cross with so angelic a meekness; no murmur of impatience at her grievous burden ever escaped her gentle lips. Many a time, when he saw her with her poor little child, the

young fellow was obliged to turn away to hide the tears that forced themselves into his eyes. If the little creature had been the fairest child that ever gladdened a mother's heart, her tenderness to it could not have been so exquisite: it needed its helplessness, its affliction, to call forth all the divine mother-love that lies in such a heart as Osyth's.

As for Alsager, the sight of it was abhorrent to him: he could not conceal a shiver when his eyes rested upon it. Perhaps, if he had known the agony he caused his poor wife by this evidence of his repulsion, he would have made a greater effort over himself: but he was a man, and the gentle hypocrisies that women use had not been cultivated by him.

But Osyth smiled bravely before her husband and the world: in her own sorrow, she never forgot the pleasure and comfort of others, and for the sick and poor and suffering she was even more thoughtful, if such a thing were possible, than in the old days.

No one could have accused Alsager of being unkind to her; his manner towards her left nothing to desire, and she had unlimited command of all he possessed. He was only indifferent to her, glad to get away from her, eager for the society of women who formed the strongest possible contrast to her.

Lord Fairholme had the tenderest, gentlest regard for Lady Ryvendale; perhaps, next to Viva, he thought more of her than of any other woman. Sometimes, as he and Alsager smoked their cigars together of an evening, he would glance furtively at him, and say to himself, "What is there in him to have won the love of two such women? And, having won them, what devil has goaded him on to break their hearts?" Yet, personally, he liked Alsager: when he spoke of his past life, when he mentioned either of these women, and told his own tale, it would have seemed hard to accuse him of wanton cruelty to either. Had he not begged Viva to remain with him and been willing to give up Osyth for her sake? If she had not fled from him, he would infallibly have married her when the duke died. As for Osyth, could he do more for a wife than he did for her? She had borne him this poor, miserable travesty on humanity, instead of the heir his heart desired. Well, poor soul! it was no fault of hers. Only he could not feel the love for her that he would have done if she had been mother to a child he could be proud of,—a child who

would have drawn them every day nearer together. It was the "force of circumstances."

Never did it enter Lord Ryvendale's brain to think that any fault or guilt lay at his own door. It was Fate who crossed and thwarted him, who turned sweet to bitter, and cursed the life she might so easily have blessed.

His estate gave him no pleasure. What was the use of improving his property when he had no heir to leave it to? It would nearly all go to a distant relation, a man whom he had never seen but once and had then pronounced a snob. He was beset by the yearning that is commonest to man, the yearning after the impossible. He had never been particularly devoted to children: until the last year or two he had not troubled his mind about who was to come after him; now it was becoming a mania with him: the thought of that distant cousin inheriting all these fair acres turned the very sight of them to gall. If he had done as duty bade him, and married Viva, even though their first-born could not have inherited Ryvendale, they would probably have had other children as fair, as bright as the boy whom his heart longed after. Little did he guess, when he was talking to Lord Fairholme about the child, that his friend was constantly in the habit of seeing and playing with him. Lord Fairholme judged rightly that, once Alsager knew where Viva and the child lived, no sense of honor or duty to his wife would restrain him from trying, at all events, to see them. And a pang of jealous wonder smote him whether Viva, with the marvellous faculties of forgiveness that women possess, would be ready to pardon and forget the grievous wrong he had done her. Whilst Alsager made a thousand conjectures as to her whereabouts, Lord Fairholme listened in silence, feeling very like a hypocrite, but knowing that his hypocrisy, if it were such, was fully justified. No good could come of those two meeting again; and how much misery might result to one!

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### BERTIE.

MASTER BERTIE CARLTON was in the habit of taking a ride on his Shetland pony every morning. He was invariably attended by Fletcher, who walked beside him, although Master Bertie's dignity did not permit of his holding the bridle. It had been a long promise that the young gentleman should go up to the Row; and this June morning, it being a deliciously fine one, and not too hot, the promise has been put into execution. They enter the ride from the Kensington end, and are proceeding in a leisurely manner towards the Albert Gate. It is early yet,—only eleven o'clock; consequently the Row presents rather a deserted appearance, and Bertie is considerably disappointed.

"You tole me it was full of gem'men an' ladies ridin'," he says, with indignant reproach, to his body-servant.

"So it will be, sir," Fletcher replies: "only just you wait a bit, and you'll see."

There are one or two people sitting on benches, and a few strolling about. But coming towards them is a gentleman, walking with a rapid step, as though he, at least, had business of some kind on hand. Fletcher has been watching him uneasily for some time: as he comes near, the man suddenly discovers that Bertie's saddle requires attention. He stoops: his face is red, and his fingers tremble nervously.

He hears the footsteps hesitate, then stop; his own name is uttered.

"Fletcher!"

Fletcher turns and mechanically touches his hat.

But Lord Ryvendale is not looking at him: his eyes are fixed eagerly on the child. He has no need to ask any questions: one glance at that lovely, cherub face is enough. Bertie's hat is far back on his head, and leaves uncovered the

golden curls on his brow; his glorious eyes are wide open and fixed on the stranger with all a child's curiosity; his round limbs would make a sculptor long to model them; about him, altogether, there is an easy grace, a bold, dauntless expression, that make him worthy to be a king's son. Lord Ryvendale's heart beats thick and fast; a mist comes before his eyes; then, suddenly, without a word, he bends over, lifts the boy out of his saddle, and strains him to his heart.

Bertie is not frightened, but he is considerably astonished, and, when he is replaced on his pony, looks at Fletcher for an explanation. But Fletcher has none to give.

"I need not ask in whose service you are," Lord Ryvendale says, in a voice which betrays considerable emotion. "Where do you live?"

"I beg your pardon, my lord," Fletcher answers, "I am not at liberty to tell you."

"I *must* know," says Alsager, impetuously. "Do you suppose, now that I know you are in London, I shall not find you out? You may as well tell me."

He takes out his note-case, and begins to separate a bank-note from others.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," says Fletcher, coloring. "I do not know whether you think of bribing me, but I may as well tell your lordship it will be no use trying."

Lord Ryvendale returns the case to his pocket.

"You are an honest fellow," he remarks. "Perhaps you may like to hear that I have never been able to replace you. If you think I have any intention of annoying—" here he pauses. It was on the tip of his tongue to say, Lady Ryvendale. What is she called now? he wonders—Duchess de Lallière?—"annoying—your mistress," he proceeds, "you are very much mistaken. All I want is to see this boy sometimes. I know she would not refuse me. Will you ask her, and write me what she says?"

"No, my lord," Fletcher answers, promptly. "My mistress has got more settled in her mind now, and if you offered me a thousand pounds, begging your lordship's pardon, I would not name you to her."

Alsager's brow contracts.

"Well," he says, after a pause, "will you meet me sometimes with the child, and not say anything at all about me?"

"No, my lord," is the firm response. And then Fletcher, feeling his heart rise in honest wrath against his master's selfishness, makes bold to say something on his own account.

"If you were to know all my poor lady has gone through, I don't think you would want to bring it all back to her again. I don't believe any man with a heart in his body would do it. You are married, my lord; you have a child of your own, I'm told: let my mistress and the young master be. You can't do neither of them no good. I wish you good day, my lord." And he begins to move on.

"One moment," says Lord Ryvendale, stooping over Bertie. "Will you kiss me, my boy?"

Bertie offers a wet kiss in answer, but it is sweet to the man who, for the first time, has found a father's heart.

"What is your name?" he asks the child.

"Come, Master Bertie!" says Fletcher, trying to draw the child away.

"Leave go my 'orse!" cries the young autocrat. "I *sall* tell gem'man my name. My name Bertie Tarlton," he roars, as Fletcher, disobedient for once, leads him off.

Whatever may be the business that was leading Lord Ryvendale with rapid steps towards Kensington, it will have to wait now. He sits down on one of the benches, and follows the child's retreating figure with longing eyes. Presently he notices a youth loitering about, somewhat out at elbows, and having, apparently, no particular object in view, except to pass the time.

Lord Ryvendale beckons him.

"Here, my lad," he says: "have you a couple of hours to spare?"

"Yes, sir," is the quick response.

"Would you like to earn a sovereign? or have you more money already than you know what to do with?"

The lad's eyes glisten.

"Well," pursues Lord Ryvendale, "you see the child on a pony, with a man walking beside it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to follow them at a distance and find out where they live. On no account let the man see you. When you are sure you have tracked them home, jump into the first hansom you can find, and come to me at this address."

"Yes, my lord." And the youth touches his hat and dawdles along behind the trees, in the wake of Bertie and Fletcher.

Then Lord Ryvendale pursues his way to Kensington.

Fletcher, as he walks along in the contrary direction, is sorely vexed and puzzled in his mind. It is so long since he has seen his former master, the connection between Lord Ryvendale and his mistress has been so utterly cut off for these years past, that it had almost slipped out of his memory altogether.

He never dreamed for an instant that had Lord Ryvendale met him in the street he would have showed the slightest recognition of him, least of all when he was with the child. He had thought his lordship would have been even more anxious, if possible, than the other parties concerned to ignore the past, now that he was married and settled down at the Court. Was he going to begin his persecutions again? Was his poor mistress, now she was just getting reconciled to her new life, to have all the past brought back to her? Not if he could prevent it. But how could he? He would tell Mr. Carlton, and between them, perhaps, they could manage to prevent Lord Ryvendale seeing or holding any communication with her. But then there was the boy. It was ten to one that he would go straight to his mother and tell her all about the stranger who had lifted him off his pony and kissed him. Then he was sure his mistress would question him. Well, if she did, he would tell a lie. It would be a righteous lie. He would swear that the gentleman was not Lord Ryvendale, but some other man who was fond of children and had lost one of his own. He knew it would be no use asking the child not to tell his mother,—he would be sure to do it then,—and there was just a chance that he might forget all about it in the excitement of his ride in the Row. When he turned into the gates of Mr. Carlton's house, Fletcher had not the faintest idea that he had been tracked home by Lord Ryvendale's spy.

On the afternoon of the same day, Alsager was walking up Albemarle Street. A young man came out of one of the houses as he passed.

"How are you, George?" said Lord Ryvendale. "I rather want to see you. Are you going anywhere in particular?"

"No; only to the club. I'll come back with you." And he opened the door with his latch-key, and preceded his friend into the house.

For a moment after they entered Lord Fairholme's room, Alsager was silent: then he broke out:

"I have seen him!—the most glorious fellow you ever set eyes on. I should have known him even if he had not been with Fletcher: my heart would have told me. I never knew what it was to be a father until to-day!"

Lord Fairholme turned very pale, but his friend was too excited, too much occupied with his own thoughts, to perceive it.

"I do not think I ever felt a greater happiness in my life," pursued Lord Ryvendale, "than when I held that boy in my arms to-day."

"What!" cried Lord Fairholme; "you spoke to him?"

"Why not?"

There is a considerable pause.

"It did not occur to you, I suppose," said Lord Fairholme, "that *she* would hear of it?—she who has buried herself down there and taken another name that she might hide herself from you and forget you."

Lord Ryvendale looked at him with a thunderstruck air.

"What!" he exclaimed; "you know where she is? You have seen her?"

"Yes, I have," returned the other, defiantly.

"And yet you have heard me speak of her a thousand times, have known my anxiety about her and the child, and never uttered a word to lead me to suppose that you knew more of them than I did myself!"

"I would rather have cut my tongue out," said Lord Fairholme.

"What do you mean?" cried the other, with a heavy frown.

"I mean that her only chance of happiness is to forget that you ever existed. Her uncle has done all in his power for her; he has adopted her boy, and given him his name; by his advice, she has dropped her own name and title. She is occupied, half with her child, half with religion: there is nothing to remind her that she ever knew you, or that you wronged her, except her own heart. She lives in strict seclu-

sion: there is no one to betray her secret unless you elect to do it."

"What do you take me for?" exclaimed Lord Ryvendale, haughtily.

"I know what I shall take you for," returned the other, fiercely, "if you attempt to see her or her child."

The two men, who, ten minutes ago, were sworn friends, stand looking at each other with angry eyes and a bitter feeling in their hearts.

"And pray," says Alsager, recovering himself a little, and speaking in a cold, hard voice, "may I ask what concern it is of yours? And may I further ask how, if" (again the difficulty of the name presents itself)—"if—the duchess so completely wishes to cut herself off from the past, how it happens that she receives you at her house?"

"Yes, you may ask," Lord Fairholme replies, with a glow of color on his handsome face, "and I will answer you: it is very simple. I have always been in love with Madame de Feuil" (unintentionally he betrays her assumed name, and Alsager notes it), "from the first time that I saw her. When she lived under your protection" (he winces as he says it), "I loved her. I told her so: I asked her to trust herself to me, —you had already begun to neglect her,—and I swore, if the duke died, wherever and whenever, I would make her my wife. And, by God," says the young man, passionately, "I would have kept my oath in a different fashion from that in which you kept yours."

"And you dare to tell me this!" cries Lord Ryvendale, furiously.

"Dare is a silly, quarrelsome word," says Lord Fairholme, coolly. "She forbade me the house, and I never saw her again until after you deserted her."

"I did *not* desert her," interrupts Alsager: "it is a lie."

"We need not quibble about a word. You made it so plain to her that you were weary of her, she had no resource but to leave you. And can you lay your hand on your heart and say you did not know the duke was dead when you married the present Lady Ryvendale? Well, I thought I had forgotten her, until I met her in Switzerland soon after your marriage. I asked her to be my wife then: she refused me. I have asked her since; Mr. Carlton has pleaded for me;

but she always refuses. I will marry her to-morrow, next month, next year, ten years hence, if she ever changes her mind."

"And all this time," exclaims Lord Ryvendale, with bitter resentment in his voice, "you have been playing a part, you have been pretending that you knew no more of her than I did!"

"I have pretended nothing. I have listened to you and kept my own counsel. But now the time has come for me to speak, and I say that if you attempt to see her or the child, and you cannot see Bertie without its coming to her ears, you will be committing the worst crime of your life."

"A crime! humbug!" retorts Alsager. "I do not wish to see her,—you need fear no interference from me,—but why should I not see the child? He is my own flesh and blood" (fiercely), "I have a right to see him."

"You have played a father's part by him, have you not?" exclaims Lord Fairholme, unable to repress the taunt.

But Lord Ryvendale goes on without heeding it:

"I ask nothing more than to see him sometimes. He shall never know from me that I am his father. Surely you might understand my feeling! You know my bitter disappointment about Lady Ryvendale's child" (shuddering): "why should I not have the consolation of seeing the one to whom all my heart goes out? Surely it is enough punishment that I cannot proclaim him as my own!"

"You do not seem quite to remember what your wish involves," remarks Lord Fairholme, coldly. "You say you wish to see the boy,—that the sight of him to-day has inspired feelings in your heart that you never knew before. If you were to go on seeing him, they would probably grow stronger; you would not be able to repress them. The child would talk about you: not only would the mother's feelings be harrowed up, but suspicion must be excited. Gradually the truth would ooze out: some day poor Lady Ryvendale would come to hear of it. In the name of common humanity, how can you think of torturing the hearts of two women whose misfortune it has been to love you, and who have suffered so much through you?"

"Upon my soul," cries Alsager, "I am at a loss to understand you. If the duchess has something to complain of at

my hands, I suppose you will hardly presume to say that my wife has a grievance against me."

"Yes, she has," cries Lord Fairholme, hotly. He is in a mood for plain speaking to-day. "You make her heart ache every day of her life. When you shudder openly, as you do, at the sight of your poor little child, when you make allusions in public, as you do a hundred times a day, to your disappointment, to the little interest you take in the property because there is no one to come after you,—every gesture, every word, is a stab straight to her poor heart. She bears it like an angel: perhaps that makes you think she does not feel it. And your manner to every woman who comes under your roof is different from what it is to her. There is a sort of chill kindness in your eyes and voice when you speak to her, as though you were calling people to witness how forbearing you are, although she has disappointed all your hopes; but when you talk to Riette, or any other woman, then you put on that charming manner which, I suppose, was given you to befool the sex with. I have often felt indignant with you: upon my soul" (hotly), "I have often wondered why, knowing as much about you as I do, I still liked you and called you friend."

Lord Ryvendale is apparently stunned by the other's vehemence, for he makes no answer. Perhaps his heart smites him that these words are true; perhaps he is thinking of something else altogether and has not heard them: at all events, he sits silent and motionless, and makes no effort to defend himself. After a minute, he rises slowly to his feet, and says,—

"I don't know that I need take up your time any longer." Then he makes for the door. For a moment, Lord Fairholme thinks of letting him go; then, as his hand is on the door, he calls,—

"Ryvendale!"

Alsager turns.

"If I have spoken hastily," says his friend, "forgive me. I do not mean by that that I retract or mean less than I have said; only perhaps I had better have kept it to myself. But, for God's sake, think what you will be doing in seeing or taking notice of that child. His future is assured: people may guess, but they cannot *know* the truth about him. You talk of a father's feelings: well, I should think, if they are

genuine, they would make you study first what is for his good, and be ready to sacrifice yourself, not him."

"Thanks for your advice," returns Alsager, with an angry glitter in his eyes. "But it seems to me that you are too interested a person for it to be of very much value."

Lord Fairholme makes no answer, and Alsager goes out and shuts the door behind him.

The club does not see Lord Fairholme this afternoon: he stays at home and thinks. But neither time nor reflection serves him: he sees no way out of it if Alsager adhere to his selfish wish about the boy. What will Viva do? If he ask to see the child, will she have courage to refuse him, or will she consent? Perhaps Bertie may bring them together again; she will be induced to see him; and then good-by to all peace or happiness for her in this life, and for poor Lady Ryvendale too. He believes that Alsager has only to see her again, with the feeling that he is irrevocably parted from her, for all his love to return. Much as Lord Fairholme loves Viva, it is no selfish thought that makes him look forward with an agony of dread to such a possibility.

As Alsager walks away from Albemarle Street, his heart is full of anger and jealousy. He tells himself that Fairholme has behaved scandalously,—in fact, in a most dishonorable, underhanded way from first to last. If he had only known this when he was plotting to marry him to Riette and having him constantly down at the Court! He remembers, with a tingling sense of mortification, how he used to talk to him about Viva and the child, all the time that the hypocrite was in the habit of seeing them, though he never betrayed himself by word or sign.

It enraged him to think there was a possibility of Viva marrying him; it enraged him equally that Lord Fairholme should want to marry her. In spite of the wrongs he had heaped upon her, Alsager felt that she could not, ought not to, belong to any one after him. He had deserted her, he had married another woman, and yet he told himself that she ought to live forever upon his memory.

And then he wondered what infatuation could have made him prefer Osyth to her! "It is fate," he said, with a sigh. "Fate!" Never once did it occur to him to blame his own inconstancy, his own selfishness. No, it was fate! Fate had

been too strong for him. His sin had found him out, but he did not acknowledge that he had sinned. In his own eyes he was only a victim to "the force of circumstances."

---

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE LAST "GOOD-BY."

VIVA and Désirée were standing on the door-step, waiting anxiously for Bertie's return. Both were convinced that nothing could happen to him whilst Fletcher was with him; and yet their woman minds, so ingenious at self-torture about those they love, were tormented by a dozen fears that they dared not communicate to each other. It wanted a quarter to one: he had started at ten: never before had he been so long absent. Désirée went down the drive, opened the gate, and looked out. Bertie and Fletcher were at that moment coming round the corner, and Désirée offered up a devout prayer of thankfulness. Then, after the manner of her sex, her mind being set at ease, she proceeded to look daggers at her slave, Fletcher, and to scold him volubly for having given Madame such a fright.

"You go 'long, and don't bozzer Fleshy!" cries Master Bertie, imperiously. And then, as he sees his mother advancing towards him, he shouts out, lustily,—

"Mamma! mamma! Bertie been to Lunnon. Bertie seen tousans of gem'men, an' ladies, an' 'orses, an' 'ansom cabs. Let me down, Fleshy—quick!" And, being dismounted, he rushes into his mother's arms. Fletcher hastens away with the pony: he is in mortal dread of hearing the child narrate the meeting with the strange gentleman in the Row. He has a guilty feeling as though he were responsible for the unlucky event. But, in his excitement, Bertie has for the moment forgotten this episode of his ride. It is not until he is half through his dinner that he remembers it. He pauses with his spoon midway to his mouth.

"Mamma!" he says.

"Well, my darling?"

"A gem'man took Bertie off his 'orse, an' gave him such a squeeze. It nearly took Bertie's bref away."

"Did he, darling?" says Viva, smiling. "What a very odd thing for a gentleman to do! But I wish Bertie would say horse instead of 'orse."

"'Orse," repeats Bertie, making a grand effort, but without success.

"I sink he knew he was naughty" (continuing his narrative), "'coss he looked as if he was going to ky, an' Fleshy was korss with him."

"Why was Fletcher cross?" asks his mother, not as yet attaching any importance to the occurrence.

"Bertie don't know. Gem'man want to know where we live, an' Fleshy wouldn't tell him. Gem'man same name as Fairy" (Bertie's *sobriquet* for Lord Fairholme), "'cos Fleshy kept on sayin' my lord to 'im."

Then, for the first time, a suspicion dawns upon Viva, and crimsons her cheek with a burning blush. She turns away to hide her face: but who can conceal anything from the piercing eyes of a child?

"Mamma, why is zoo face so red?" he asks, with a merciless stare. "Fleshy's face was red when he spoke to gem'man. Was gem'man very naughty to take Bertie off his 'orse?"

The pony is about the size of a big Newfoundland dog, but the young autocrat insists upon its being dignified by the more important name.

"No, darling," replies his mother. "Tell me: what more did he say to you?"

"He not say much to Bertie: he talk most to Fleshy. He wanted to give Fleshy bit of paper like Uncle Barnard keeps in his purse, and then Fleshy look very angry, so gem'man put it away."

Few grown-up persons can take in a conversation as children do, even though they may not understand it; and yet people are in the habit of talking before them as though they had neither eyes nor ears nor (above all things) intense curiosity.

Viva's suspicions deepen with every word the child utters. Her heart beats tumultuously, and yet she cannot analyze the feeling, whether it is all pain and terror, or whether some ray of pleasure mixes with it.

Bertie proceeds:

"Then gem'man ask Bertie to kiss him, and Fleshy go on gettin' korsser, and gem'man ask Bertie his name. And then Fleshy naughty an' took 'old of Bertie's 'orse, but Bertie call it out after gem'man."

Here the child remembers some other incident of the ride, and dashes into it, to his mother's infinite relief. She scarcely hears the rest of his voluble prattle, so absorbed is she in thought. Presently Désirée comes for him, and Bertie, finding his mother not such good company as usual, goes off unreluctantly.

Viva feels that she must know the truth. There is only one way of arriving at it,—through Fletcher. But she cannot make up her mind all at once to re-open the old wound.

She throws a mantilla over her, and goes out through the window into the garden. There is a broad strip of velvety turf, planted on either side with old-fashioned single rose-bushes, and at the end of it stands a quaint old arbor. This strip of turf is Viva's favorite walk. How many a time has she paced up and down it, trying, by saying prayers to herself, to still the heart-ache and the thoughts of old times which she fancies were happy, and which it is sin to remember now. She has thanked God fervently and sincerely for his chastisement, for plucking her from her sin while there was yet time; she is content to forego all hope of joy in this life, so only she save her soul at last.

She is not strong; it tires her to walk long, and she seats herself in the old-fashioned arbor and goes on with her meditation.

At last she summons up resolution. There is a gardener working within call, and she bids him go in-doors and send Fletcher to her.

Fletcher nerves himself for the interview: he has been expecting a summons, and has carefully arranged his story. Only, unfortunately, he has reckoned without Master Bertie. He goes at once to the summer-house, with a brisk, alert manner, intended to divert suspicion. All his life Fletcher has been honest and truthful: it is something quite new for him to dissemble; and he looks upon it as a stern and painful duty, pretty much as an habitual liar might nerve himself for once to speak the truth.

Viva has also to dissemble: she cannot rush upon the subject at once. Her heart beats as Fletcher approaches her; she can scarcely command her voice as she makes the simple request to him that she has chosen as a pretext for her summons.

"I want you, Fletcher," she says, "to be so good as to carry a parcel for me to the village. It is for poor old Mrs. Smith. Stone will give it to you."

"Yes, madam," answers Fletcher, with alacrity, hoping his fears are unfounded. "Can I do anything else?"

"No, thank you," Viva answers, and Fletcher is about to go. She calls him back in a low voice.

"Master Bertie tells me," she says, in a hesitating tone, but trying hard to speak naturally, "that a gentleman came up to him in the Row this morning, and lifted him from his pony and kissed him." And she fixes her eyes, which until now have been averted, on the man's face.

Fletcher could not look at her and tell her a lie, so he seems attracted by an insect crawling up the woodwork as he answers, with suspicious glibness,—

"Oh, yes, madam, an old friend of mine, a Mr. Brown. It was rather a liberty, certainly, but he is very fond of children, and he lost a beautiful little boy not long ago, just about Master Bertie's age."

And, as his mistress makes no immediate rejoinder, Fletcher, congratulating himself upon the way in which he has discharged his disagreeable duty, prepares to depart.

"Fletcher!" utters Viva, in a low voice. This time he cannot help but look at her. There is a faint color in her cheeks, her lips quiver; she fixes her beautiful eyes on him as though she would read his very soul. Then she says, "Why were you angry? Why did he offer you money? Why did you call him 'my lord'?"

A peony would look pale compared with Fletcher's countenance at this moment. He is dumfounded, not having prepared himself for such an emergency as this.

"Was it Lord Ryvendale?"

Fletcher heaves a great sigh.

"Well, yes, madam, it was," he says. "It's no use my trying to deceive you: it was his lordship. I thought I was doing my duty not to tell you, but a lie always did stick in my

throat. I hope you won't think any the worse of me for this one."

"I *know* you meant it for the best," Viva answers, gently. "But now I shall be glad if you will tell me exactly what happened."

Fletcher repeats the incident in a few words.

"Thank you," she says, when he has finished.

Then, for the third time, Fletcher prepares to depart, and this time Viva does not stop him. She leans her arms on the table and buries her face in her hands. All the old agony of her shame sweeps across her. During these past years, sheltered by her uncle's love and tenderness, by the respect and devotion of her two faithful servants, the memory of what she has been has gradually faded from her mind. In her prayers, in her humiliation before God, she has remembered it, but in her every-day life there has been nothing to remind her that she has been of those to whom the world gives no social status or respect. To-day she remembers that she has been Lord Ryvendale's mistress, and that it is only the nobility of heart of those three faithful friends that permits her to forget what she really is, and to seem to lead an honored life. She is overcome by Fletcher's delicacy in trying to conceal from her an incident that would remind her of the bitter past.

And then she thinks of Alsager. She does not blame him for what happened this morning: it seems more natural to her that he should have acted as he did, than that he should have turned his head aside and passed by, knowing that Bertie was his child. Nay, she thought better of him for yielding to this instinct of a father's heart. She no longer regards him with the passionate alternations of love and hatred that he once inspired in her lacerated heart: it has been part of her religion, part of her penance, to forget him,—at all events, not to dwell upon his memory.

No, she is not angry with him,—does not think bitterly of the selfishness of his action; but he must not see or speak to the child again, for Bertie's sake. In after-years, people may surmise what they will, but whilst she lives, the truth must be concealed at any sacrifice, lest he come to despise her. Some day, when she is dead, perhaps he will hear the truth, and will think tenderly of her, and pardon her, as one does

the dead, even though they have sinned against us; but she has besought God to deal her any punishment, howsoever bitter, rather than to let her read contempt and loathing in her child's eyes.

What shall she do?

The summer afternoon wears away, and still she sits irresolute, sometimes thinking, sometimes praying God with all her soul to show her what she ought to do. At last she takes a resolve. If Alsager insist on seeing the child again, she will write to him,—she will conjure him to leave her in peace, not to drive her out from this refuge that, through her uncle's goodness, she has found. But when did he ever sacrifice his will to hers? when did he forbear any self-gratification at her prayer? Well, then, if he would not give up seeing the child, there was but one alternative. She would flee away with her boy, somewhere, so far from his reach that he would no longer think of following them. Then she thought of her uncle. Was his home to be broken up, his comfort destroyed, after all he had sacrificed for her?

"I must wait and see what happens," she says, at last. "God give me patience."

And then she draws her shawl round her, and goes towards the house. She coughs two or three times as she goes, and the head-gardener, who is talking to the housekeeper, remarks, shaking his head,—

"I don't like that cough of Madam's. It's just such a one as my poor Mary had."

"Lor!" answers Mrs. Stone, "I've known people with much worse coughs than that, and it didn't kill 'em. She don't seem ill with it."

"No more didn't my Mary, till just at the last," rejoined the man.

"Bless the man!" says Mrs. Stone, tartly, "don't be hinting at such a thing! Why, what would her uncle and Master Bertie do if anything was to happen her, let alone Fletcher and Madamasel Zery! I never saw a lady so worshipped as she is."

"And so she ought," answers the gardener. "Them's the ones the Almighty chooses to take. I suppose he knows best, though I wasn't willin' to own it when my poor lass went."

All night through, Viva lies broad awake. She never sleeps well now, even at the best of times, but to-night she hears every quarter chime until six o'clock, when she falls into a feverish doze. What pain, sorrow, anxiety, suffered in the daytime, can equal those dread nights when sleep flies us, and the fevered, tired brain wears itself out in fears and terrors, and we would purchase forgetfulness at almost any price!

When she comes down to breakfast in the morning, Mr. Carlton eyes her anxiously.

"My love, you are not looking well," he says. "I am afraid you have had one of your bad nights again."

"I did not sleep very well," Viva answers, trying to smile.

"Now, what could be the reason?" says her uncle, reflectively. "Perhaps you did not have air enough yesterday: you did not take your usual drive." And the kind old man goes on hunting in his brain for the cause of Viva's sleeplessness.

"I am afraid I shall have to return to my old, bad habits," she replies, "and take something to make me sleep. Oh!" with a little groan, and putting her hand to her head, "it is so terrible to lie awake all night."

"Yes, yes," he answers, soothingly,—"it must be. Thank God! I have not known it for many years by personal experience. Yes, anything is better than lying awake; though I detest the thought of opiates. I believe they ruin the constitution. Let Jones come and see you and prescribe something. I will call and tell him on my way to town."

"No, Uncle Bernard; please do not. I have a prescription that always answers,—that is, if I do not take it too often. Will you leave it at the chemist's for me?" And she goes to her escritoire and takes out a thin, yellowish piece of paper, stamped with the names of many chemists. She can never look at it without a little shudder: it is the prescription the French doctor gave her the night after the duel.

Her uncle has kissed and wished her "good-by," Bertie has gone out on his pony, accompanied by Fletcher, and Viva, feeling the need of fresh air, which is indeed the only alleviation to the nerves after a sleepless night, goes out into the garden.

She speaks for a few moments to the head-gardener, and then turns to seek her favorite walk. A footstep on the

gravel behind her causes her to look round. Then, for a moment, she stands quite still, trembling in every limb; her tongue cleaves to the roof of her mouth, her heart throbs wildly. Lord Ryvendale is before her.

"Forgive me," he utters, in a low voice. "I have no right to be here. I watched Mr. Carlton and Fletcher out, and stole in like a thief. Do not be angry!—do not call any one!" for she looks about her as though seeking help. "Let me go into the house with you and say what I have to say, and then I will go away at once, I swear to you."

The recollection flashes across Viva of what she meant to write to him: perhaps, after all, since he is here, it will best be said.

"Come," she utters, in a trembling voice, and he walks beside her, without speaking, into the house. Never had she dreamed that he would set foot again without her consent in any home of hers; but there must be no witnesses to this interview, and so she leads him in through the window of her sitting-room.

As Alsager glances around at the elegance and luxury of this dainty apartment, a pang of bitterness enters his heart to feel that, of all this, she owes nothing to him,—that she has refused to accept anything at his hands,—that she and her child are entirely, utterly independent of him.

Viva sinks into a chair: she is so ghastly white that, for a moment, Alsager fears she is going to faint, and hurries towards her. But she motions him away with an unmistakable gesture.

Lord Ryvendale stands, leaning against the carved chimney-piece with his eyes fixed upon her. He had almost forgotten how fair she was: certainly he had not expected to see her still so young and lovely. He wonders remorsefully to himself how he could ever have preferred Osyth to her.

Presently she speaks.

"Why have you come here?" she asks, in a low, troubled voice.

"I cannot tell you," he answers. "I had not the very faintest thought of attempting to see you when I started this morning. I only wanted, unseen, to get a glimpse of the boy. Then, when I saw Mr. Carlton and the child and Fletcher all come out together, I thought I would make an effort to see

you instead of writing to you. And when I opened the gate, I saw you standing, and I came in."

"You came in," she says, slowly, "that you might remind me of my misery, my shame, my degradation,—of all that I have been trying to forget and live down since I last saw you."

"Why did you leave me?" he cries, with some passion: "you would have been my wife now."

"I do not think so," she answers. "And, if I had, you would have been indifferent to me,—perhaps have hated me. I thank God that he gave me courage to go when I did."

"You misjudge me," he cries, advancing towards her. "On my soul I have never loved a woman as I did you." He stops within a foot of her chair: something in her face forbids him to approach nearer. "You know what efforts I made to get you back when you left me: it was your own act that separated us; and when time went by, and I knew it was hopeless to think of you, I—I married. If the duke had only died a few months earlier——"

"You would have married Miss Sartoris all the same," Viva interposes, quietly. "I do not reproach you: if I once felt bitter against you, God knows I have forgiven you long ago, standing as I do in such sore need of forgiveness myself. When once a woman has sinned as I have done" (her voice trembling, her eyes filling with tears), "she has no right to look for respect or fidelity: the vows a man has made to her are not binding, because they were unlawful; if he break her heart, he is acquitted of remorse, because she has deserved her fate."

"Do not talk like that, Viva!" cries Alsager, impetuously. "God knows if my life has been smooth and pleasant since you left me, if I have had any happiness in it!"

She gives him a surprised glance.

"But," she says, "you married the woman whom you desired, the one with whom you were to begin a fresh life!"

There is a shade of bitterness in her voice as she says the last words, but she conquers the feeling, and adds, "And she is a good woman: you ought to be happy with her."

"Yes," he repeats, irritably, "she is good,—too good. She is a saint, and I, being of the earth, earthy, am overwhelmed by her goodness. I love the world,—at least I care for no-

thing else,—and she takes no interest in it. We have nothing in common."

"Have you no children?" Viva asks.

Lord Ryvendale shudders, as he always does at the recollection of the poor little creature who calls him father.

"Do you not know?" he asks. "But why should you?" (bitterly.) "I have thought of you so often; but I suppose you have never cared or tried to know anything about me. Oh, yes! I have a child" (laughing harshly),—"it would do your heart good to see it beside that glorious boy of yours,—a poor deformed thing, half an idiot. Thank God, it is a girl!"

"Poor thing!" utters Viva, tenderly. She is thinking of the mother.

"And yesterday," says Lord Ryvendale, "when I saw that noble little fellow (I should have known him even if Fletcher had not been there), it nearly broke my heart. Oh, Viva, you must let me see him sometimes. Do not, I beseech of you, deny me that! Since yesterday I have thought of nothing else. It would give me a new object in life: I should have something to live for. Think of all I can do for him, even though he cannot be my heir. From this moment I will begin to save for his sake. I can make his life as happy and prosperous as though he were my openly-acknowledged son."

And, in a moment, a delightful picture opens before Alsager of all he will do for the boy, of having him for a constant companion, of being allowed, through their mutual love for him, to see and be with Viva sometimes. His eyes brighten at the thought; he looks eagerly at Viva for her consent: he cannot think she will refuse his entreaty.

A sudden cold freezes her heart as she realizes the utter selfishness of the man who is ready to sacrifice everything, every one, to his own desires. He is here now, regardless of compromising the position which she has won after painful years: he is planning to blast his child's future by proclaiming openly his illegitimacy and his mother's shame; he cares not how he may wring his wife's heart by putting another woman's child before hers: there is but one thought in his heart, the gratification of his own whim. She rises to her feet and confronts him. In the eyes where he has been used to read love, there

is scorn to-day,—a righteous, noble scorn,—scorn not of the man, but of the cruelty, the baseness, the selfishness in him.

"If you knew what a father's love means," she says, "you would know that above all things it desires its child's well-being. Bertie's future is assured; my uncle has given him his name, has made him his heir: he can gain nothing *from* you, he may lose all *through* you. And for me, there is nothing left me but my child. He is mine, not yours" (with flashing eyes), "and I will keep him to myself. I am glad you came, because I can tell you face to face what I mean to do, and if I had written it you would perhaps not have believed me. You see me here, surrounded by every comfort. I have torn myself away from the past; I have cut myself off from the world. I am resigned to live without any other hope or joy, because my life is bound up in my child. I have repented in dust and ashes of my sin. I acknowledge the justice of God's judgment upon me, and I thank him humbly that he has left me so much more than I deserve. It will be terrible to me to leave this place, to go out into the world again, to begin another life. But, if you are not content with all the agony I have suffered for your sake, it is for you to drive me forth again: it may be my punishment is not yet finished."

"What do you mean?" asks Lord Ryvendale. "Viva, why do you say this to me?"

"I mean this," she says, regarding him with a steadfast gaze: "that from the day that you again speak to or notice my child, from that day you make me a wanderer and an outcast from my home. If I have to go thousands of miles away from England to hide him from you, I will go; but never shall he know that you are his father, never shall he learn his mother's shame."

"You are talking wildly," says Lord Ryvendale. "If you would let me see him, you should bind me down by the most sacred oaths never to divulge to him that I am his father."

"The most sacred oaths!" she repeats, looking up in his eyes. But they quail and turn from hers.

"If you wish to revenge yourself upon me by depriving me of the happiness of seeing him," says Alsager, "I must submit. But do you believe that you can keep the truth from him forever? When he grows up, he is bound to learn it."

"I shall be dead long before then," she answers, simply. "And a child can pardon a dead mother, when, if she were alive, he would shrink from her." And then a little sob rises in her throat.

A sudden revival of the old tenderness comes into Alsager's heart as he hears her sad words. Until this moment, he has hardly remarked how frail and delicate she has grown. A dimness creeps before his eyes, a great repentance fills his heart; for once he says to himself, "I have sinned." He longs to fall at her feet, to entreat her forgiveness: he makes a step towards her——

The door is burst open, and Bertie, flushed with excitement, rushes in.

"Oh, mamma! mamma!" he cries, flying to his mother's arms, and then, seeing a stranger, stops suddenly short.

"Why, that Bertie's gem'man!" he says, with wide-open eyes, looking from one to the other.

Lord Ryvendale snatches up his hat and rushes from the room. He does not even see Fletcher's resentful face as the man opens the hall door for him: his heart is full of grief and despair.

For once Nemesis overtakes him in the thought that he is leaving forever the two beings who might have made his life what he once dreamed it.

---

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### "THE TRIUMPH OF TIME."

After the night of the ball, when Otho had so grievously sinned in Riette's sight, he went on falling deeper and deeper into her bad books. She would have nothing at all to say to him, and so he did his best to console himself with Mrs. Fairstar. Unfortunately for Riette, although she was so bitterly indignant with him, and would not, if she could help it, even give him her hand to shake, she could not conquer her love for him. She found herself continually thinking of his

handsome face and pleasant manners, and was furious to find how affectionate her thoughts of him would become when she was off her guard. If plucking him out of her heart had been a physical action, instead of a moral and figurative one, she would have summoned up all her resolution and have performed the operation at once.

In the autumn, the young gentleman out-Heroded Herod, for he invited a large party to shoot at Helmstone Park, and Mrs. Fairstar was one of his guests. True, Mr. Fairstar accompanied her, but Riette set him down in her mind as either unprincipled or criminally weak, and refused to believe that his presence would be any check on the shameless pair. Although Sir Otho constantly invited the rector and his daughter, Riette steadily refused to join his parties. Sometimes her father went without her; sometimes he, too, declined, for, although his affection was as warm as ever for the young fellow, he did not quite approve of all he saw. For his part, Otho seemed more attached than ever to the rector, and could never show him enough attention.

By this time the master of Helmstone Park was quite aware that Riette disapproved of his attentions to Mrs. Fairstar, but he did not know the real reason why she was so bitter on the subject. Had he done so, it is highly probable that the fair Laura would have been compelled to look out for a fresh victim to succeed him. There would have been an explanation, a tableau, "Bless you, my children!" a grand wedding, and subsequently the loyal tenantry would have erected triumphal arches and have dragged the handsome young couple home. There would have been an escort of yeomanry, speeches, cheers, waving of handkerchiefs, and unlimited refreshments to warm the hearts and reward the loyalty of the enthusiastic crowd. Sir Otho and Lady Desmond would have been quite an old married couple by this time. However, the explanation did not take place, because Riette made a point of never being alone with the young man, and it would certainly have required a private interview for Otho to elicit the sentiments of his perverse lady-love. For, as a matter of fact, he was still in love with her, although he was as much disgusted with himself for being so as was Riette for a similar reason.

One fine day, feeling unsettled and discontented with himself, he made up his mind to go and shoot big game in India.

A great friend of his was going, and had once or twice tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to join the party, and all of a sudden it came into his head that it was a delightful idea and would suit him down to the ground. So he bade farewell to Riette, who gave him a cold, indifferent "good-by," though she felt as if her heart would break at losing him, and to Mrs. Fairstar, who betrayed the deepest emotion, but did not forget to hint at her desire to be remembered in the way of various costly products of India. Frank could not object to her accepting cashmeres, or carved ivory, or costly skins,—particularly when the giver was thousands of miles away. She was disgusted at losing him, but Frank had been throwing out some very disagreeable innuendoes lately, so perhaps his going was an interposition of Providence. And she would not be left forlorn now Captain Benyon was coming home from Gibraltar.

It was odd that Riette, who had been in the habit of confiding everything to her sister, scarcely spoke of Otho to Lady Ryvendale, and forbore all mention of his disgraceful behavior at the ball. And Osyth, being very ill and nervous, was not so quick to perceive Riette's loss of gayety as she would have been at any other time. Then came her terrible illness and the birth of her poor little child, and by the time she recovered, Otho had been away some months. She had only seen him once since her marriage, and that but for half an hour, and in the presence of others; else it is probable that he would have taken her into his confidence about Riette's strange, perverse, unkind behavior to him. He wrote from time to time to the rector, and when he heard of Osyth's illness he sent her an affectionate letter. In it he said,—

"It seems so strange to me that, having been brought up, almost, with you and Riette, and devoted to you all my life, we should now be little more than strangers to each other. I was naturally grieved and nettled when Riette threw me over for Charlie, having considered it an immutable law of nature that we were destined for each other and must some time become man and wife. The dear old man who is gone had set his heart upon it almost as much as I had. Of course Riette had the right to do as she pleased, if she found she cared for some one more than me. But what I shall never understand

is, why, when we came to meet again after that time, she should have treated me in the way she did. Any one would have thought the positions were reversed, and that it was I who had thrown her over, not she me. She can't surely have thought I had anything to do with Charlie's behavior; but no! she must have known me too well. I should have been more often to the Court when I was at home, only you seemed so ill, I did not like to bother you, and Riette was like an iceberg, and somehow I fancy your husband never quite cottoned to me. So, under all these circumstances, I thought it as well to keep away. But when I do get back I hope to see a great deal of you and to melt Riette's hard little heart. Don't think I flatter myself that she will ever care for me, except perhaps with a fiftieth degree of the old sisterly feeling she once had for me. Heaven knows when I shall be back! it is not unlikely I may go right round the world,—some of us talk of it,—and long before I get back I dare say she will have married Fairholme, or some other fellow. I feel very sore when I think of such a possibility, because *I am certain* I shall never care for any woman again as I have done and do for her, though I have tried my hardest to get over it. I dare say you heard that I went on rather foolishly with a certain fair lady; but I should never have behaved in the way I did if Riette had not exasperated me by her cold and contemptuous ways in London. I never saw any one so altered from the sweet, kind, affectionate little girl she used to be in the old days,—not that I want to find fault with her, God bless her! I am sending home a few shawls and things for you and her, which I hope you will both accept, with the best love of

"Your affectionate

"OTHO.

"P. S.—Don't think, from what I said, that there is any harm in poor little Mrs. Fairstar: there is not indeed. She is pretty, and likes admiration, and has *such a brute of a husband!*"

Lady Ryvendale gives the letter to her sister to read, and Riette's heart thrills with pleasure at his words,—all but the postscript. That makes her pinch her pretty lips together, and considerably embitters the sweet that has gone before.

"Is it true, darling?" Osyth asks, gently. "Did you treat Otho so badly, or is it his fancy?"

"I do not think I treated him badly," Riette answers, "but I was very angry with him. Indeed, Osie, if you had seen him with that *horrid* woman, I think you would have felt the same."

"We must not judge, darling. If, as Otho says, she has so bad a husband, although it cannot excuse her, it is some palliation. And you see he acquits her of everything but vanity."

"You are an angel, Osie," replies her sister, "and you are ready to believe everything people tell you. And what Otho says about my being the cause of his behaving as he did with her is not true. I was delighted to see him again in London: I felt towards him just as I had always done. Then the first thing I hear of him is that he is flirting with a married woman; I would not believe it; I was most indignant; but that very same day I saw with my own eyes the confirmation of all I had heard. And of course, after that, I was cold and contemptuous: I hated him," says Riette, passionately.

"But, darling," utters Osyth, gently, "I do not understand you. I can fancy your being very sorry; but why should you hate him? I should have thought that you would be more likely to try to act a sister's part by him, to remonstrate with him, and to tell him that he was laying himself open to misconstruction."

"I tell him!" cries Riette, with flaming cheeks.

As Osyth looks at her sister's excited face, a sudden light dawns upon her.

Perhaps, after all, the dearest wish of her own and her father's heart may come to pass, and they may yet see Riette Otho's wife.

And now that my story is so near its close, let me pause for a moment to say a few words about Osyth, lest I should leave the impression on the reader's mind that I have consigned her to perpetual sorrow. No one who is good and sweet and gentle as she is, no one who believes and trusts in God as in a father, no one whose life is spent in love and care for others, can be all unhappy. And Osyth is not. She has been afflicted, but in the midst of her afflictions she remembers more to thank God for the blessings he has given her than to mourn over those he has denied her. She loves her

husband dearly: not one bitter thought does she cherish against him. And it is our own feeling to people, more than their actions to us, that makes us unhappy or the reverse. She has her father and sister near her, and she has the knowledge, than which none can be sweeter to a noble heart, that hundreds of people are the better for her, that God has made her an instrument to relieve a thousand wants and woes, to dry the tears of the sorrowful, to bring smiles upon faces seared by want and misery. And last but greatest of all her blessings she deems her little child. The fairest, loveliest cherub whose smile was ever reflected in a proud mother's eyes never inspired a deeper, more tender love in a woman's heart. To Osyth her child was not misshapen, nor wanting in intelligence: that it had need of her was the great tie that knitted it to her tender heart: if others turned from it, so much the tighter she clasped it to her sheltering breast.

And so the sympathizing reader may take leave of her, quite satisfied that in her sweet, loving, thankful disposition she is far happier than many of her sisters to whom God has given affectionate husbands and beautiful children, and who yet fall far short of her endowments, since they carry not with them, as she does, the firm belief that whatever he orders must needs be well.

* * * * * * *

One June morning Sir Otho sets foot once more on his native soil. His heart is full of pleasure. To be an Englishman, to come back to your own country after a prolonged absence!—I can think of no more delightful sensation.

Sir Otho has many pleasant sensations besides to indulge in. He is expected at Helmstone Park, which he intends to make his head-quarters for the present. Riette is not married, and he has reason to think, from a letter received a few days previously from Lady Ryvendale, that she is not quite so bitter and inveterate against him as he had imagined. At any rate, there will be no Mrs. Fairstar to come between them this time.

Twenty-four hours more, and he has received an enthusiastic reception at home, has been down to the rectory, where his old friend has given him the heartiest of welcomes, and is on his way to the Court, ostensibly to call on Lady Ryvendale, actually to see her sister, who is spending the day with her.

He is ushered into the morning-room where Osyth is sit-

ting. She starts up with a glad smile at sight of him, and in the joy of his heart he cannot refrain from kissing her sweet, smiling face. And then some kind, happy instinct makes him turn to the tiny chair where the little child sits hugging its doll, and he lifts her up in his arms and kisses her as though she had been the fairest, straightest-limbed little creature in the world. She does not shrink from him, as is her wont with strangers, but smiles in his kind, handsome face.

Many a heroic action has set human hearts throbbing less than this simple one does the mother's to-day. Tears rush to her eyes, her heart is too big for words; but if the young fellow had been a great diplomatist, desiring Osyth's suffrages, instead of only a kind-hearted man obeying the promptings of good nature, he could not have achieved a greater success. It is not long, we may be sure, before Sir Otho inquires after Riette.

"She has gone into the garden to gather roses," Lady Ryvendale tells him. "You must go and find her. She will be so glad to see you."

"Do you really think so?" he asks, eagerly, flushing even through the bronze that sun and sea have painted him lavishly with.

"I am *quite* sure of it," she answers. And then, smilingly, she crosses the room and opens the French window. "You know the rose-garden," she says.

Sir Otho needs no further hint. He is flying down the terrace steps in a trice, and along the level greensward that leads to the rose-garden. It is not long before he catches sight of a fluttering white dress, and in another moment he is face to face with his love, past, present, future. She is hatless, as usual, with the sun streaming in a golden glory upon her shining hair and cream-white skin over which he has no power. Sir Otho is more potent than the strong sun-god: he can bring the rosy color blushing through that fair skin: the girl's face is as pink as any rose among the dainty-colored ones that bloom around her. She smiles upon him: she looks glad, unmistakably, undeniably glad. And suddenly, impelled thereto by his young blood, his wild, unrestrainable delight at seeing her once more, lovelier, he thinks, than ever because she smiles upon him, he catches her to his heart and covers her face with kisses.

The basket flies from the girl's hands, the roses are strewn hither and thither on the ground, and she stands there, not knowing whether to be glad or angry, delighted or indignant. But, somehow, she has a feeling as though she has reached the end of a long, tangled, ravelled skein, and a delightful vista of joy and happiness is suddenly opened before her.

As for Otho!—— But no!——

* * * * * * *

Never in this world was there a wedding that gave such universal satisfaction. Never did a country village witness more sincere or loyal sympathy than the marriage of Sir Otho and Riette occasioned. What I described a few pages back as something that might have happened was mere child's play compared with what actually did take place; for I forgot to count the Ryvendale tenantry, who, for the bride's sake, and for her sister's, were no less hearty in their demonstrative good will than Sir Otho's tenants and Mr. Sartoris's parishioners.

Never did September sun shine more gloriously; never (so all declared) were so handsome a couple as the bride and bridegroom, whose path was literally strewn with roses; and never (that I will vouch for) was there a happier man than Sir Otho when he rose from the steps of the altar, and, in the face of every one assembled (and with their hearty sympathy and approval), bestowed a fervent kiss upon the lips of the charming Lady Desmond.

* * * * * * *

And as far as I know, though their affection has undergone the severe test of some years of matrimony, there is not a more united or devoted couple in Christendom than the lord and lady of Helmstone. They do not even quarrel over the bringing up of their children.

THE END.

# By Julien Gordon.

*"Now and then, to prove to men—perhaps also to prove to themselves—what they can do if they dare and will, one of these gifted women detaches herself from her sisters, enters the arena with men, to fight for the highest prizes, and as the brave Gotz says of Brother Martin, 'shames many a knight.' To this race of conquerers belongs to-day one of the first living writers of novels and romances, Julien Gordon."*

*FRIEDERICH SPIELHAGEN.*

A WEDDING, and Other Stories.

POPPÆA.

A DIPLOMAT'S DIARY.

A SUCCESSFUL MAN.

VAMPIRES, AND MADEMOISELLE RÉSÉDA.

Two stories in one book.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00 per volume.

"The cleverness and lightness which characterized 'A Diplomat's Diary' are not wanting in the later work of the American lady who writes under the pseudonyme of Julien Gordon. In her former story the dialogue is pointed and alert, the characters are clear-cut and distinct, and the descriptions picturesque. As for the main idea of 'A Successful Man,' the intersection of two wholly different strata of American life,—one fast and fashionable, the other domestic and decorous,—it is worked out with much skill and alertness of treatment to its inevitably tragic issue."—*New York World.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By John Strange Winter.

(Mrs. Arthur Stannard.)

## A Magnificent Young Man.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"There is a happy mingling of comedy and tragedy in *A Magnificent Young Man*. It is a story with an original plot, involving a secret marriage, the mysterious disappearance of a bridegroom, and the experiences of a young girl, who refuses to clear her reputation, even to the mother of her unacknowledged husband, until such a time as he shall give permission. The plot is well sustained, the incidents and dialogue are entertaining, and the mystery is kept up long enough to hold the close attention of the reader to the last chapter."—*Boston Beacon.*

## Every Inch a Soldier.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"Of the incidents of the work before us, the plot is highly entertaining, and incidentally we meet the Bishop of Blankhampton, whose matrimonial affairs were ably discussed in a book previously written. It is a very pleasant and readable book, and we are glad to see it."—*Norristown Herald.*

## Aunt Johnnie.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"Mrs. Stannard preserves her freshness and vivacity in a wonderful way. 'Aunt Johnnie' is as bright and amusing a story as any that she has written, and it rattles on from the first chapter to the last with unabated gayety and vigor. The hero and heroine are both charming, and the frisky matron who gives the story its name is a capitally managed character. The novel is exactly suited to the season, and is sure to be very popular."—*Charleston News and Courier.*

## The Other Man's Wife.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"The hero and heroine have a charm which is really unusual in these hackneyed personages, for they are most attractive and wholesome types. Indeed, wholesomeness may be said to be the most notable characteristic of this author's work."—*N. Y. Telegram.*

## Only Human.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"A bright and interesting story. . . . Its pathos and humor are of the same admirable quality that is found in all the other novels by this author."—*Boston Gazette.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron.

A Tragic Blunder.
A Bad Lot.
A Daughter's Heart.
A Sister's Sin.
Jack's Secret.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"Mrs. Cameron's novels, 'In a Grass Country,' 'A Daughter's Heart,' 'A Sister's Sin,' 'Jack's Secret,' have shown a high skill in inventing interesting plots and delineating character. All her stories are vivid in action and pure in tone. This one, 'A Tragic Blunder,' is equal to her best."—*National Tribune.*

This Wicked World.

In a Grass Country.
A Devout Lover.
Vera Neville.
A Life's Mistake.
Pure Gold.
Worth Winning.
The Cost of a Lie.
A Lost Wife.

Cloth, $1.00.

"The works of this author are always pure in character, and can be safely put into the hands of young as well as old."—*Norristown Herald.*

"A wide circle of admirers always welcome a new work by this favorite author. Her style is pure and interesting, and she depicts marvellously well the daily social life of the English people."—*St. Louis Republic.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By Capt. Chas. King, U.S.A.

Under Fire. Illustrated. The Colonel's Daughter. Illustrated.
Marion's Faith. Illustrated. Captain Blake. Illustrated.
Foes in Ambush. (Paper, 50 cents.)

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

Waring's Peril. Trials of a Staff Officer.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

Kitty's Conquest.
Starlight Ranch, and Other Stories.
Laramie; or, The Queen of Bedlam.
The Deserter, and From the Ranks.
Two Soldiers, and Dunraven Ranch.
A Soldier's Secret, and An Army Portia.
Captain Close, and Sergeant Crœsus.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00; paper, 50 cents.

"From the lowest soldier to the highest officer, from the servant to the master, there is not a character in any of Captain King's novels that is not wholly in keeping with expressed sentiments. There is not a movement made on the field, not a break from the ranks, not an offence against the military code of discipline, and hardly a heart-beat that escapes his watchfulness."—*Boston Herald.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By Marie Corelli.

## Cameos.

Ten Short Stories. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

The surprising versatility of Marie Corelli has never been better displayed than in this varied group of short stories which run the whole gamut of feeling, sentiment, and purpose known to contemporary fiction. Appearing as they do almost simultaneously with "The Sorrows of Satan," that wonderful romance of nineteenth-century life which is the theme of the day, alike in England and America, they serve to mark the tenderness, the love of human sentiment, and the sympathy for human suffering which are naturally less emphasized in the more powerful and concentrated novel.

## The Sorrows of Satan;

Or, The Strange Experience of one Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire.

A Romance. With frontispiece by Van Schaick. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"There is very little in common between this story and 'Barabbas.' In 'The Sorrows of Satan' Miss Corelli wields a much more vigorous pen. She is full of her purpose. Dear me, how she scathes English society! She exposes the low life of high life with a ruthless pen. The sins of the fashionable world made even Satan sad; they were more than he could bear, poor man! The book is lively reading, and will be read in England with an eager curiosity."—*Chicago Tribune.*

## Barabbas.

A Dream of the World's Tragedy.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

"A book which aroused in some quarters more violent hostility than any book of recent years. By most secular critics the authoress was accused of bad taste, bad art, and gross blasphemy; but, in curious contrast, most religious papers acknowledged the reverence of treatment and the dignity of conception which characterized the work."—*London Athenæum.*

## Vendetta;

Or, The Story of One Forgotten.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

"It is a thrilling and irresistibly charming book."—*Baltimore American.*

"The story is Italian, the time 1884, and the precise stage of the acts, Naples, during the last visitation of the cholera. A romance, but a romance of reality. No mind of man can imagine incidents so wonderful, so amazing as those of actual occurrence. While the story is exciting, and must be read through when once begun, it furnishes a vivid and impressive picture of Italian life and morals."—*Washington National Republican.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By "Ouida."

Two Offenders.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

Syrlin. Guilderoy.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

Othmar.
A House-Party.
Puck.
Pascarel.
Bébée.
Signa.
Cecil Castlemaine's Gage.
Folle-Farine.
Granville de Vigne.
Idalia.
Randolph Gordon.
Strathmore.
In a Winter City.
Ariadne.
Friendship.
Moths.
Beatrice Boville.
Chandos.
Tricotrin.
Under Two Flags.
A Village Commune.
In Maremma.
Princess Napraxine.
Wanda.

12mo. Cloth, $1.00; paper, 40 cents.

"'Ouida' is one of the most interesting writers of her time. She has close observation, much imaginative fertility, a copious vocabulary, and a retentive memory."—*New York Herald.*

"'Ouida's' stories are abundant in world-knowledge and world-wisdom, strong and interesting in plot. Her characters are conceived and elaborated with a skill little short of masterly, and the reflective portions of her stories are marked by fine thought and a deep insight into the workings of human nature."—*Boston Gazette.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By Frances Courtenay Baylor.

## On Both Sides.

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

"A novel, entertaining from beginning to end, with brightness that never falls flat, that always suggests something beyond the mere amusement, that will be most enjoyed by those of most cultivation, that is clever, keen, and intellectual enough to be recognized as genuine wit, and yet good-natured and amiable enough to be accepted as the most delightful humor. It is not fun, but intelligent wit: it is not mere comicality, but charming humor; it is not a collection of bright sayings of clever people, but a reproduction of ways of thought and types of manner infinitely entertaining to the reader, while not in the least funny to the actor, or intended by him to appear funny. It is inimitably good as a rendering of the peculiarities of British and American nature and training, while it is so perfectly free from anything like ridicule, that the victims would be the first to smile."—*The Critic.*

## Behind the Blue Ridge.

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

"It is lighted through and through by humor as subtle and spontaneous as any that ever brightened the dark pages of life history, and is warmed by that keen sympathy and love for human nature which transfigures and ennobles everything it touches."—*Chicago Tribune.*

"Intensely dramatic in construction, rich in color, picturesque in description, and artistic in its setting. No more delightful picture of the every-day life of the Virginia mountaineers could well be imagined."—*Philadelphia Record.*

## A Shocking Example, and Other Sketches.

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

"Rarely have we enjoyed a more delightful series of literary entertainments than have been afforded by the handsome volume containing fourteen stories and sketches from the bright pen of Frances Courtenay Baylor, whose 'On Both Sides' has won for her so enviable a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic."—*Boston Home Journal.*

Miss Baylor's complete works ("A Shocking Example," "On Both Sides," and "Behind the Blue Ridge"), three volumes, in box, $3.75.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By C. F. Keary.

## Herbert Vanlennert.

**Author of "The Dawn of History," etc. 12mo. Cloth, $1.25.**

"The book is a refreshing one, both in plot and style."—*Public Ledger*, Philadelphia.

"Mr. Keary is an accomplished craftsman, who knows how to tell a story, how to evolve character, and how to make the fortunes and fate of the dwellers in an imagined world as important to the reader as the fate and fortunes of his neighbor in the world of sight."—*New York Book-Buyer.*

"It is an interesting story, with its scenes laid in England, and with a measure of sentiment running through its pages. Mr. Keary writes very pleasingly, and his plots are cleverly constructed."—*New Orleans States.*

"A thoroughly English story, and quite interesting from every point of view. Mr. Keary has given us nothing of the sensational, but provides us with an elaborate, well-matured story of English life, with characters representing people of art and culture."—*Elmira Telegram.*

"'Herbert Vanlennert' is one of those stories that come like a ray of sunshine on the murky literary horizon. It is the history of a young man who is not one of those impossible individuals one reads so much about and never sees, but is on the contrary a straightforward narrative, with its fictional coloring painted true to nature. The scene is laid in Europe, and the reader is taken by fascinating channels to various parts of the continent. A strong tracing of social realism is very palpable, and the book leaves a good taste in the mouth."—*Tribune*, Oakland, Cal.

"The novel is one of the genuine English character, both in form and spirit. There is a bloomy blush all over it that suggests the ripeness of plum fruit. The reality of life among educated and cultured persons is turned into a deliciously delicate romance, with actuality all the while furnishing the foundation. There is a luxurious content in reading page after page of such natural scenes and actions so naturally told by one whose art is skillful to conceal his art in the task he undertakes. Politics furnishes spice in the combination of the elements of the tale, Oxford studies lend their adornment to the grace and point of its running colloquies, and the interest of financial fortune bears its vital part in the contact of the characters. The university flavor that pervades the whole will prove not the slightest of the attractions it offers to readers who will give their verdict for the completeness and finish of the novel. A real London novel it is from the first page to the last."—*Boston Courier.*

J B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

# By Charles Conrad Abbott.

## A Colonial Wooing.

A Novel. 12mo. Cloth, $1.00.

"Those of our readers who remember Dr. Abbott's 'Travels in a Tree-Top,' published about a year ago, will be glad to get this new volume from his pen. It is a study of social life during the early Colonial period in this section of New Jersey. The story is a charming one, and will add very much to Dr. Abbott's literary reputation."—*Trenton True American.*

## The Birds About Us.

Illustrated. Crown 8vo. Cloth, $2.00.

"This book is one of the most complete and interesting studies of the birds of our country that has ever come to our knowledge, and must be valued by every lover of our feathered friends. Its style is familiar and genial, and it is not burdened with technicalities, while its descriptions are perfectly accurate. Dr. Abbott shows an ardent love for his subject, and his book will fascinate as well as impart a large amount of information. The author has been a close student of birds, and he very justly thinks that what so many authors have treated as instinct would have been better described by the word intelligence."—*Boston Home Journal.*

## Travels in a Tree-Top.

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

"Mr. Abbott is a kindred spirit with Burroughs and Maurice Thompson and, we might add, Thoreau, in his love for wild nature, and with Olive Thorne Miller in his love for the birds. He writes without a trace of affectation, and his simple, compact, yet polished style breathes of out-of-doors in every line. City life weakens and often destroys the habit of country observation: opportunity, too, fails the dweller in cities to gather at first hand the wise lore possessed by the dweller in tents; and whatever sends a whiff of fresh, pure, country air into the city house, or study, should be esteemed an agent of intellectual sanitation."—*New York Churchman.*

## Recent Rambles; Or, in Touch with Nature.

Illustrated. 12mo. Cloth, $2.00.

"In the literature of nature Dr. Abbott's books hold a peculiar place. With all their close application they are not too technical, and their charm for the general reader is the more potent in that this is so. We all love nature, but we do not all care to embark in a study of ornithology, botany, and zoology in order to appreciate it; and in this new volume we find how keen our enjoyment can be, even if we do not possess such scientific knowledge. Those, on the other hand, who are already students of nature, will be fascinated by the wide and accurate information gained for them by the Doctor's numerous tramps and multiplied hours of observant idleness. The book is full of touches of humor, unexpected turns, and pungent sayings, and should be perused by every one of our readers."—*Commercial Advertiser* (Detroit).

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.